CHILDREN OF GIBEON

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/childrenofgibeon00besa_2

CHILDREN OF GIBEON

II

NOVELS

BY

WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE.

Crown 8vo. cloth extra, 3*s.* 6*d.* each ; post 8vo. illus. boards, 2*s.* each ; cloth limp, 2*s.* 6*d.* each.

READY-MONEY MORTIBOY.
WITH HARP AND CROWN.
THIS SON OF VULCAN.
MY LITTLE GIRL.
THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT.
THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY.
BY CELIA'S ARBOUR.
THE MONKS OF THELEMA.
'TWAS IN TRAFALGAR'S BAY.
THE SEAMY SIDE.
THE TEN YEARS' TENANT.
THE CHAPLAIN OF THE FLEET.

NOVELS BY WALTER BESANT.

Crown 8vo. cloth extra, 3*s.* 6*d.* each ; post 8vo. illus. boards, 2*s.* each ; cloth limp, 2*s.* 6*d.* each.

ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN : an Impossible Story. With Illustrations by FRED. BARNARD.

THE CAPTAINS' ROOM, &c. With Frontispiece by E. J. WHEELER.

ALL IN A GARDEN FAIR. With 6 Illustrations by H. FURNISS.

DOROTHY FORSTER. With Frontispiece by CHARLES GREEN.

UNCLE JACK, and other Stories.

London : CHATTO & WINDUS, Piccadilly, W.

CHILDREN OF GIBEON

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN'
'DOROTHY FORSTER' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1886

[*The right of translation is reserved*]

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

BOOK II.—continued.

CHAPTER		PAGE
V.	A REAL DAY'S WORK	1
VI.	BEHIND ST. LUKE'S	38
VII.	THE PROFESSOR OF YIDDISH	65
VIII.	LOTTY'S FOOLISH DREAM	84
IX.	SHOWING HOW THE BAND PLAYED	104
X.	THE REVEREND RANDAL SMITH	128
XI.	A DEAD MAN'S STEPS	145
XII.	THE WOOING OF THE SPHYNX	171
XIII.	A USELESS CRIME	185
XIV.	ASK ME NO MORE	204
XV.	BROTHER JOE'S DISCOVERY	224
XVI.	THE EARTHLY TRACT SOCIETY	238
XVII.	THE STEP WITHOUT	260
XVIII.	LE PÈRE PRODIGUE	290
XIX.	IN THE CHURCHYARD	316

CHILDREN OF GIBEON

BOOK II.—continued.

CHAPTER V.

A REAL DAY'S WORK.

'If you please, Melenda,' said Valentine, presenting herself in the morning after breakfast, 'I am come to do Lotty's work for her to-day.'

Lotty was with her, looking guilty and rather frightened.

'I didn't ask her, Melenda,' she explained.

'She wants a rest,' said Valentine; 'I mean to do it. May I work here with you, Melenda, or shall I work in my own room? It will be quieter for Lotty if I sit here.'

'It is only another of their whims and fancies,' said Melenda, looking at Valentine as

13

if she was a Specimen. 'Give her the work, Liz, and let Lotty lie down till she's tired of her fancy. That won't be very long, and it'll rest Lotty. Then she'll put it down and go away and forget all about the work and Lotty too. They've got nothing to do and so they're full of fancies. Here, take the work.'

She ungraciously motioned Valentine to a bundle of shirts, as yet without their button-holes, lying on the table.

'Lotty must have rest, Melenda,' Valentine replied, without referring to Melenda's analysis of her own character. 'She wants more food and less work. Let her lie down and rest in my room because it's cooler than this.' She did not add that it was much cleaner, much sweeter, and much prettier. 'She shall have my dinner and I will have hers, if you like.'

Lizzie, remembering the ham, chuckled sarcastically. It was her only contribution to the conversation.

'Don't be ungracious, Melenda. I have not offered to give you anything.'

'You shan't, then. There!' Melenda dashed her work aside and sprang to her feet

in a sudden passion. 'I'll take nothing from you—nothing. Not even your cheek, nor your pride. And you shall take nothing from me. Oh! you come here and you think you can make me humble because you've got some money saved and some fine friends, and you've been brought up like a lady and taught to despise us all, and then you think you'll spite me by taking Lotty from me. You shan't have her—no.' She laid her arm round her friend's neck and became immediately soft and tender. 'No, Lotty dear; she wants to part us, but she shan't, shall she? All these years we've been friends and worked together, you and me, and borne such a lot and never grumbled, and she's only just come. I'll do your work for you as well as my own, Lotty, and welcome, if I have to sit up all night for it. But I can't get ham and grapes for you—work all I know—like she can.' The quick tears sprang to her eyes at this consciousness of inferiority.

'She doesn't want to part you and me,' said Lotty, 'I know she doesn't; and you oughtn't to think I'd ever leave you. Don't be so hard on her, Melenda. Isn't she your sister and all, though she is a young lady?'

Melenda dashed the tears from her eyes. Was Lotty herself going to desert her?

Lizzie went on with her work, her head bent over the button-holes as if her friend's health, and any discussion which might arise upon it, was of no concern at all to herself. But she looked up now and then furtively, just to see whether Melenda was going to catch it or to let some one else catch it. Melenda's tears were but the drops of a short shower which comes before a thunderstorm. She stood with kindling eyes and clenched fists. She was jealous; she was so jealous that she would have liked nothing better than to have fallen upon poor Valentine and—luckily, she did not do it. But she looked so fierce that Valentine remembered what had been said to Violet about the tearing out of ladies' hair, and wondered if she was going to lose her own. She was fierce because she was jealous, and she was jealous because Lotty was visibly drawn towards Valentine, and because for the first time her own sacrifice of work and time could do nothing for her friend compared with the soft words, the grapes, and the creature comforts so freely bestowed by the new-comer.

'You shan't take her from me,' she cried again, but with weakened force.

'Don't, Melenda,' said Lotty. 'I'm not leaving you. Oh! why are you so cruel to her?'

Melenda gave in. She said nothing, but threw herself into her chair and gathered up her work. If Lotty wanted to leave her, she must go. That is what her attitude and action meant.

'Look at her,' said Valentine, taking advantage of this momentary weakness which might mean softening; 'look at her pale face. Let her rest to-day and have good food—to-morrow is Sunday. I will go on with her work here, and you may say as many hard things to me as you please.'

'I tried to do for you, Lotty—I tried my best, I did.'

'You did, Melenda dear. Oh! yes, I know. But it's my back.'

'Take her, then,' said Melenda with a kind of sullen dignity. 'Give her what you like. Give her hot roast beef and potatoes, if you like; but you shan't give none to me.'

Valentine led Lotty away, and set her in

her own chair with a pillow in the back, and placed some books on the table within her reach. Then she went back to the work-room.

Now, as regards the girl who was sick, she, left to herself, began first to turn over the leaves of a book which had pictures in it. It was a book of poetry. The only poetry Lotty had ever learned or read—because in the Select Academy poetry was not part of the Curriculum—was the verse contained in the hymn-book used by the chapel where in their palmy days her unfortunate family had worshipped. But it was a great many years since she had gone to any church or chapel, and the hymns were well-nigh forgotten by this time and the hymn-book lost. Consequently when first she looked at the 'reading' and saw that it was verse, she thought it must be a hymn-book; but when she came to read the hymns in it and found she could not remember to have read anything like them in her own book, and missed all the old tags and phrases, she began to fear that Valentine was a heretic of some kind. Of the narrow creed which had been preached in that little Primitive Christian Church some few rags

and tatters remained; notably, that everybody who did not hold the Catholic Faith as expounded by the Primitive Christians was in a perilous state; and that to be a Papist, or an Anglican, or a Congregationalist, or a Presbyterian, or a Unitarian was to invite certain destruction, while even to continue in the twilight of Baptistdom or Methodism was to incur great risks. It is odd how, when one's early faith is forgotten, the narrowness of it may remain, like the crust in the bottle after the wine has been poured out. So Lotty closed the book, in confusion of spirit, remembering something vague about falling from sound doctrines, and bethinking herself of some half-forgotten phrase about the wiles of Satan. These wiles had never been presented to her in a prettier form than in this dainty volume with its pictures and its poetry.

The ignorance, if you come to think of it, of London work-girls and, very likely, of work-girls everywhere, is colossal; it passeth understanding. They have no books in their rooms, not one single book, not even a Bible or a Prayer-book or a hymn-book—single-room lodgers never have any books; they read no-

thing at all, neither books, nor newspapers, nor journals, nor magazines, nor tracts. They have no knowledge of literature in any form. They hear nothing of the outer world: the men, for their part, may meet and discuss things with some show of knowledge, because they sometimes read a newspaper, but the girls do not; therefore they have not the least understanding of what is going on anywhere, and in all the Art, Science, and Knowledge which we call the inheritance of the Ages, they do not own the smallest share. Since, then, they are as ignorant of everything as the inhabitants of the Solomon Islands, without being anything like so well-fed and so comfortable or so pleasantly clothed, would it not have been far better for all these girls if they had been born in that Archipelago instead of Christian England? There at least they would have no shirts to stitch if there were none to wear, and they would have plenty to eat, even if it were only dried *bêche-de-mer*, and there would be sunshine and warmth for all.

Two of these girls had been educated at Board schools, where they had reached the third or fourth standard. If you wish, there-

fore, to know the extent of their possible knowledge, read the third and fourth standard books, and remember that they have already forgotten almost all they ever learned from those encyclopædic works. And if they are ignorant of book-learning they are equally ignorant of all that is concerned with industry, wages, and trades. They have not the least idea that they could ever better their condition; they do not understand that they might rebel, or strike, or combine, or do anything for themselves at all. They cannot go into service because they know nothing, not even how to lay a table or how to dust a room; they cannot emigrate because they would be of no use in any colony; they can only sew, and, like the steam-engines which are kept going, till they fall to pieces of old age and rust, on coal and water, the sewing-girls are just as simply kept at working-power till something goes wrong with the wheels, on bread and butter and cold tea.

Their ignorance, however, though it was colossal, did not make them unhappy, nor did it humiliate them. The great Giant Ignorance has one good point: he is, in his way, good-natured; he never suffers his victims to be un-

happy or humiliated by reason of their subjection. Melenda, indeed, thought herself possessed of extraordinary knowledge, as well as of immense sagacity.

Presently Lotty began to look about the room and to realise slowly the way in which young ladies live—always in easy-chairs, soft and low, with flowers on the table and grapes in the cupboard, curtains to the window, books on a shelf, pictures on the wall, fans, scent on the mantelshelf, and laced handkerchiefs. How would it be to live like this always, and never do any work; never to be hungry, and never to have a pain in the back? While she was thinking of this, and wondering vaguely and asking herself if Melenda was right in saying that Valentine would soon go away and forget all about them, her eyes closed and she dropped off to sleep, lulled by the unusual sense of rest, freedom from pain, and physical ease. She had, besides, a great quantity of arrears to make up in the matter of sleep, and the morning was very hot, and there was a most delicious sense of coolness in the room and the unaccustomed fragrance of flowers, all of which reasons may serve for her excuse.

The making of button-holes is one of those occupations in which it is impossible to take an artistic interest. She who sews them is not sustained by a sense of beauty, because when you have finished and turned out your button-hole, you cannot possibly call it beautiful; it is not a thing, for instance, which you can hold up and watch while the sunlight plays among the stitches and the light and shade set off their graceful curves; besides, you have got to go straight on to make another as soon as one is finished. Nothing sustains the work-woman but the reflection that, though it takes a good many stitches to make a button-hole, so many dozen button-holes make so many pence.

The making of button-holes, however, is not difficult for a good needlewoman. Valentine received a few simple instructions from Lizzie, and then, taking Lotty's place on the bed, she began her work. The button-holes were for shirts, but these were of a coarse and common kind, made of rough material, for exportation very likely—shirts warranted to be as uncomfortable and as rasping as the monastic hair shirt. In fact, I think it is very likely they were invented before the Reformation for the

use of monks and modern eremites, and then only for the strictest and most profoundly miserable Order of Self-tormentors. They are now, I believe, used for the converts (previously shirtless) made by the missionaries. And the story of 'My First Shirt' has yet to be written. So enterprising has always been the Spirit of British Commerce!

Valentine was clever with her needle, and could embroider as beautifully as Penelope. Unfortunately she was as slow and as deliberate as that lady-in-waiting, and loved to linger over her work, and look at it, and think about it, and at times unstitch some of it. Therefore she soon perceived that Melenda turned out button-holes about five times, and Lizzy about three times, as fast as herself. Then she made haste to imitate them, and addressed her mind to the question of rapidity rather than of beauty in her work.

No one spoke: there was no other sound in the room than the click of thimbles and the rustling of the stuff. Valentine's thoughts wandered from her work, which was monotonous. This, she reflected, was the room in which three girls slept, worked, and lived. They all three,

lay on one bed, that on which she was sitting. It was a broad wooden bed, with a hard mattress a good deal depressed in the middle, and neither feather bed nor springs. The hot July sun was pouring in at the window, where the yellow blind, which might once have been white and could no longer draw up, was pinned back so as to leave a triangle of sunshine. Valentine sat in the shade, and thought she had never in her life seen so many motes dancing in the sun. The room was neglected, and wanted cleaning horribly ; the grate was rusty ; there was not a book in it, or a magazine, or a paper—nothing to read ; there were no pictures on the wall ; there were no ornaments of any kind ; the whitewash of the ceiling had fallen down in one corner exposing the laths ; there was no carpet ; the two or three cooking utensils which lay within the fender seemed to have been long unused. A place, it seemed, built with intention for the abode of grinding, wretched, hopeless poverty ; a place exactly fitted for the kind of work, where there was no prospect of improvement, however zealously one worked, or of any higher pay or more regular employment.

Valentine forgot that the girls were young, and that even to work-girls there is hope, while they are young, that these troubles will pass away somehow, and give place to some unknown kind of joy.

'Well,' asked Lizzie pertly, 'isn't it good enough for you?'

It was at nine o'clock that Valentine began to work. At ten, or thereabouts, she became aware that she must stop, get up, and straighten herself. She did so. Melenda worked on like a machine, and took no notice at all. The other girl looked and smiled grimly. 'I thought you'd give in soon,' she said. 'Lotty has to lie down every half-hour.'

'I haven't given in,' Valentine replied indignantly.

Then she sat down and went on again.

In another hour her head began to reel, and she felt giddy. If two hours of button-holes produced such an effect, what would the whole day do for her? She laid aside her work, and looked up ashamed. By this time the room was very hot, although the door and window were both open, and from the street below, baked by the midday sun, there was wafted up-

wards a mingled perfume or incense, made up of things lying in the street; of the industries in the houses—such as the pressing of cloth, which is a hot and steamy smell; or the burning of leather straps, which is insidious, and makes one feel sick; with the smell from a fried-fish shop not far off—this is a smell which makes one sad; and the stale reek of yesterday's tobacco and beer—this is a smell which makes one sorry—from the public-house opposite.

'Do you do this every day?' she asked foolishly, because she knew very well that they did.

'Every day,' said Lizzie—Melenda still taking no notice—'and all day long. Don't you like it?'

'Don't you ever stop to read, or talk, or sing, or something?'

'Sing! Oh, Lord!' Lizzie replied with infinite contempt. 'Stop to sing?'

'All day long,' Valentine repeated, 'and never any holiday?'

'Only when there's no work. Fine ladies never think how they'd like it themselves'—Lizzie, too, was able to borrow something from

the indignant Sam. 'Ain't it nice to make cheap things?'

Valentine took up her work again and went on, wondering how long life could be endured if she were doomed to spend it among button-holes. Then she tried to imagine herself the lifelong companion of Melenda, and altogether such an one as Lizzie, and that she had never done anything else and never known any other kind of existence; and she wondered what she would be thinking about. But her imagination failed her, and refused to pretend any such thing, partly because the things worn by poor Lizzie were not nice to look at.

'Do you never do anything at all?' she asked presently, 'except work all day and walk the streets in the evening?'

'Some girls go to the Britannier when they've got the money, or anybody treats them. I've never got the money, and I'm not going to be treated by anybody, no more than Melenda. There used to be the Grecian as well, but they've turned that into the Salvation Army: and there's the Theatre of Varieties in Pitfield Street, there's Collins's at Islington, and there's the Foresters in the Cambridge Road.

Some girls go to public-houses and drink with the men. We won't, Melenda and me. There's talk of a girls' club, but—well, there's nothing else to do but to walk the streets at night, and you'd walk them, too, if you'd been sitting at work all day.'

'And Sundays?'

'We lie abed on Sunday mornings, and go out in the afternoons.'

'And on wet and cold evenings?'

'Then we sit at home, and go to bed early to save candle and fire.'

'Do you never go to church?'

'Not likely!'—Liz lifted her ragged skirt. 'In this?'

'Don't waste your time chattering, Lizzie,' said Melenda. Then there was silence.

Soon after noon Valentine was seized with an overwhelming desire to get up and jump, or run, or leap over something.

'I must jump!' she cried, and did it.

'That's fidgets,' said Lizzie. 'I used to have them, but I'm used to it now.'

The attack presently yielded to violent measures, for fidgets are like cramp, and must be dealt with resolutely. In reading of convicts

chained to each other, and obliged to sleep side by side, I have often thought how dreadful and intolerable a thing it would be if one of them were to get an attack of fidgets and not be able to spring out of bed. Then Valentine was going to sit down again, when Melenda interposed. Lotty, she said, always rested in the middle of the day. She had better do the same and get her dinner.

'Am I not to have Lotty's?'

'Don't be silly,' said Melenda. 'As if you could make a dinner off bread and tea! What time did you generally have your dinner?'

'At half-past seven.'

'That's supper. What did you have before that?'

'There was tea at five.'

'And before that?'

'Luncheon at half-past one.' Valentine began to feel guilty of most reckless gluttony.

'Oh! And what did you have at all of them?'

Valentine confessed with shame to meat at luncheon and at dinner, and possibly at breakfast.

'There,' said Melenda, 'it's ridiculous. You can't have dinner like Lizzie and me. Go away and get something to eat, and give it to Lotty if you like. We don't eat much here, but we're independent.'

Valentine obeyed, and the other two girls went on working in silence.

Presently there was heard proceeding from Valentine's room a most curious and remarkable sound. Nothing less than the laughter of two girls, a thing which had never happened in the house in the memory of its residents. Lizzie looked up, curious and envious; Melenda suspicious and jealous.

'They're laughing,' said Lizzie. 'What are they laughing for?'

'She's made Lotty laugh,' said Melenda, who had never even tried to work such a miracle. 'What's she said to her? Lotty wouldn't never laugh at us.'

The laughing continued, and Lizzie's curiosity increased, and Melenda's face grew cloudier and darker.

The old lady in the room below, sitting by herself with her funeral trimmings in her hands, thought somebody must have gone mad. Who

but mad people and children ever laughed in Ivy Lane? But the laughing still went on, and her thoughts flew back to a time long, long ago when the poor old thing herself laughed all day long—living in the Fool's Paradise which sees nothing around or before but a luminous and sunlit haze. Nobody would ever laugh, I suppose, if that haze were to be suddenly removed. Happy Paradise! Happy fools who live in it! And all to end in the workhouse during the winter, and such sewing as could be got in the summer from Mr. Croquemort of Bethnal Green. Presently she could bear it no longer, this poor old woman, but got up and put down her work, and stealthily crept out of her room and crawled half-way up the narrow stairs, her neck craned, her eyes glaring, her ear turned, to see what they were laughing at, and to hear what they were saying. She neither heard nor saw, but a strange emotion fell upon her withered old soul. The laughter of girls—light-hearted laughter!—she remembered how, long, long ago—fifty years ago—when she was nineteen or twenty, two young girls sat in a carriage on a racecourse, and laughed with handsome and gallant young

gentlemen, while the pink champagne foamed and sparkled in the long glasses, and the gipsy woman stood at the carriage-wheel, and the girls crossed her palms with gold. Then that old woman, with something like a sob, felt in her pocket and found twopence, and she went across the street to the 'Adelaide' and had a glass of gin. After this she returned to her own room and fell asleep, and, perhaps, dreamed of that long past happy time of unthinking folly.

As for the laughing, it was over nothing at all but the cooking of the dinner, at which Valentine showed herself so awkward and so ignorant. Why, she knew nothing, not even the price of potatoes, or how to buy them, and she had got the very dearest kind of beef, and such an immense quantity, and Lotty had to tell her everything, even to the rolling-up of her sleeves; but she would do it all herself, and so they both laughed. And the business was no doubt as comic as the making of a pudding on the stage, which is, we know, always most effective business.

And then, with the laughter, the other girls heard a hissing and sputtering, which lasted

ten minutes or thereabouts, and was accompanied by an extraordinary fragrance, of the kind which used in the old days to delight those dear, simple Immortal Gods, so easily pleased —the incense, or perfume, namely, of meat, roasted, seethed, or fried.

Then Lizzie sat bolt upright, and said solemnly, with pale cheek, and that far-off look in her eyes which a painter might take for a yearning after Things Invisible and Unattainable—

'Melenda, they've got—it's—it is—STEAK!'

'What does it matter,' said Melenda, 'what they've got?'

Lizzie was silent for another half minute. But the fragrance mounted to her brain and made her giddy, and filled her with a craving for food.

'Oh, Melenda, I'm so hungry.'

'That comes of taking things. If you hadn't eaten that ham two days ago, you wouldn't have been hungry now.'

There was once a foolish Greek person, whose history used to be read in the 'Analecta Minora,' when that work was put in the hands

of schoolboys. He had a theory that horses ate too much, and he gradually reduced the rations of corn for his own horse, with a view to making that animal live upon nothing, and become perfectly independent of food. Just as he was upon the point of success the creature died. Melenda held much the same views.

'For shame!' she added; 'where's your independence, Liz?' Just what the Greek person might have said to the horse.

'Bother Independence,' replied Lizzie, replying in the very words of the horse, 'I am hungry.'

'If you eat beefsteak to-day,' said Melenda, 'there'll be nothing but bread and cold tea to-morrow and——'

But Lizzie was gone. The perfume of the beef drew her as with ropes, and she could not choose but go.

In Valentine's room there was a white cloth spread and the dinner just ready, and Lotty, with flushed cheeks, helping to serve it, and both of them laughing.

'Come in, Lizzie,' cried Valentine gaily; 'there is plenty for all of us. Will you ask Melenda?'

'She won't come. Don't you go—she might fly in your face.'

Valentine hesitated. Then she sat down. During dinner they talked and laughed again —actually laughed and made little jokes together. When had Lotty laughed last?

Dinner done and things washed and cleared away, they went back into the other room. Melenda was still at work, dogged and stern, with hard set mouth and resolute eyes, sick with the yearning that the smell of the roasted meat had caused, but stubborn and obstinate.

'Melenda,' said Valentine, 'can you live on bread and tea?'

'What's that to you? I've got to.'

'Oh,' she cried, 'it is shameful.'

'Then mend it,' said Melenda fiercely; 'mend it if you can. If you can't, let us alone to bear it as well as we can. We can bear it, can't we, Liz?'

Lizzie turned her great eyes to Valentine.

'Can you mend it?' she asked. 'It is very hard to bear. Can you mend it?'

'Oh! I can do nothing to mend it. And Melenda will not let me do anything to help it.'

'I thought you were going to do Lotty's work.'

'She's done more already than Lotty used to do in a whole day,' said Liz. 'Let her rest a little, Melenda.'

'No, no,' said Valentine, 'I shall do my day's work.'

The slow minutes passed slowly. Through the open window there came the murmur and the hum of Hoxton Street and St. John's Road. It was rather a sleepy murmur, because Hoxton is not a noisy place, and there are few omnibuses and fewer cabs, and very few carts and waggons. Presently Valentine felt as if they were all three set down in some far-off place of torture, in an undescribed circle of the Inferno, condemned to work at button-holes without ceasing —button-holes for shirts which would fit nobody—like the unhappy damsels who have to fill sieves with water, and to spend their whole time—they've got all the time there is—in pouring it in and seeing it run out again—a most tedious employment and, one cannot help thinking, with submission and respect to the Court, a foolish punishment, and one can only hope that they get their Sundays at least free,

in which case they are no worse off than Melenda and her friends.

Presently Valentine began aloud to shape out a little apologue which occurred to her.

'Once upon a time,' she said, 'there were three poor girls, and there was a wicked Witch. The Witch was always making spells for the raising of storms and bringing diseases upon good people and thwarting the work of honest people. For use in her charms she wanted a continual supply of Button-holes; but why Button-holes are good for magic I cannot tell you, only I believe that if you work at them long enough you can raise the—the Devil. Anyhow, I know that they are most invaluable for conjuring, incantations, making people mad and miserable, and all kinds of sorcery. The difficulty with this Witch was to find people who would sew the Button-holes for her, because it is horrible work and tedious work, that no one would do if there was anything else to be done, and because it is work which by the laws of the country—but I think this law is an unjust one—is forbidden to be paid for at the rate of more than a farthing apiece, so that the fastest worker cannot earn more than

a shilling a day at it. For a long time the Witch looked about in vain. But at last she found three girls who were all so desperately poor that they were ready to take any kind of work that was offered them. It was a very heartless and wicked country, in which the rich ladies took no thought for poor girls, and did not interfere as they ought to have done, or insist upon finding them good work and fair wages, as of course they do in our own country —in England. So she offered them the work. She did not persuade them with honeyed words. She did not say, "My dears, if you will come and make Button-holes for me, you shall have roast beef and pudding every day, with money to go to all kinds of beautiful places." Not at all. She came scowling and cursing, and she threw the work in the middle of them, and she said: "You girls; take the work or leave it. If you leave it, you will starve; if you take it, you shall taste meat once a week—on Sundays, perhaps—and live for six days on bread and butter and tea. You shall work all day long except Sundays; you shall not have any holidays; you shall waste and throw away in this dreadful work all your youth and beauty; you

shall not know any pleasure or rest or fulness; you shall go hungry in body and soul. Don't think the rich ladies will interfere or help you. They care nothing for you——"'

'They don't,' said Melenda, now become interested in the story.

'"They have been told about you till they are sick of hearing the story; but they will do nothing for you. So take it or leave it." That is what the dreadful old Witch said.'

'Of course they took the work,' said Melenda.

'Of course they did; and of course they grew every day hungrier and more hopeless. And one of them was weak, and she gets weaker. Then the other two worked harder to make up. But they couldn't quite make up; and one grew more miserable, but she worked on still' —Lizzie bent her head—'and one grew harder and more angry, and she worked the hardest of all.'

'Very fine talk,' said Melenda, with an intelligent sniff. 'They've taught you how to talk. You talk as well as Sam almost.'

'But I haven't done yet. Suppose a messenger was to come from some rich lady to

these girls—a girl like themselves—and suppose she was to offer them lighter work and better pay. Suppose she was to offer them, out of her own abundance, help of any kind——'

'The girls wouldn't be fools enough to take it,' said Melenda. 'They want justice. That's what Sam says. "Take your charity away," he says, "and give us justice."'

'This lady would say through her messenger, "I cannot get justice. I am quite powerless to get justice for girls in the clutches of black wizards and witches. But I can help you three." Melenda, suppose her messenger brought this message, would you send her away?'

'You can talk,' said Melenda. 'But you won't make me take your charity.'

At four o'clock Lotty made some tea and brought it to them, Melenda not regarding. Then they went on working again in silence. By this time Valentine's fingers ached so that the needle travelled slowly, and her arms ached so that she could hardly hold the stuff in her lap, and her back, though she was as strong as most girls, ached with the stooping, and her head ached with the heat and closeness of

the room, and her fingers were sore with handling the coarse material of which the shirts are made, and her eyes were red and inflamed.

But she would not give in.

Melenda was working as fiercely and as fast as if it was seven in the morning, and she had only just begun, and then after an excellent and invigorating breakfast. Lizzie with the quiet dull patience she habitually gave to the work, but with much greater discontent, for she had now tasted some of the joys of a lady's life. It meant, she perceived, a pretty room to live in, with soft dresses and gloves, and your hair done beautifully, and beefsteak and cocoa for dinner. 'You ought,' said the gentleman she knew, 'to live like a lady, and have nothing to do all day but to let me paint your eyes. And when Valentine went away, which would be very soon, there would be no more beefsteak.

My brothers, think of it: the mind of man cannot conceive a greater temptation than this, when a girl half-starved and robbed of joy and doomed to the misery of work the most hopeless and the most miserable, perceives that the

Unattainable—the life of physical comfort and material well-being, the life she has always longed for, the life that it is natural to desire—is actually within her reach and to be had—just by signing her name to a little piece of parchment, and giving that agreement—of course after it has been duly stamped and entered at Somerset House—to the Devil.

About half-past eight Lotty came in, refreshed after her long day's rest and sleep. 'Oh!' she said, tearing the work from Valentine's hands; 'oh! Melenda, how could you let her go on?'

For Valentine's cheek was pale and her eyes were swimming, and now she looked dazed, and trembled as she sat.

'I will not give in,' she cried; but she did, because she broke into sobbing and crying, 'Oh, Lotty—is it every day—all day—all day long, like this?'

'She would do it,' said Melenda. 'Get a little water, Liz! Quick! Don't stand gaping! It's the heat of the day. Wet her temples. That's right. Don't cry, Polly. I knew you couldn't do it. Get something out of her cupboard for her, Lotty. Some of them

grapes. What can you expect of a girl like this trying to do a day's work like Liz and me?'

Melenda's good temper came back to her when once she had proved her superiority. Why, when you came to try a real day's work, where was Polly, after all? Nowhere.

'You look after her, Lotty.' She went on with her work, for there was still a quarter of an hour or so of daylight; but Lizzie threw down hers. As for Valentine, it was only for a few moments that the hysteria held her, and she sat up again recovered and a little ashamed of herself for giving in at the end. But—what a day!

It was Saturday evening, and the lane was noisier than usual. Presently Melenda herself thought she might stop, and they began to put things away for Sunday. It may be proved from religious statistics that button-hole makers, though they never go to church, are more open to conviction on Sabbatic doctrines than any other class of persons. They would even like a Sabbatic week or a Sabbatic year—that is, a whole week or even a whole year of Sabbaths.

'I must sing,' said Valentine. 'I am so tired, and I ache so much that I must sing. Do you never sing, you people? How can you live without it? I will sing to you.'

There must be some recreation after work. Melenda and Lizzie got theirs by walking the streets; Lotty hers by resting. Valentine tried to find hers by singing.

Below in the street, the people were all outside their houses, gathered in groups talking and enjoying the cool air of twilight. To these people there happened the most wonderful thing in all their experience. Suddenly there struck upon all ears the voice of one who sang—the voice was like unto the sound of a silver clarion. The song they heard went straight to all hearts by reason of the air, for they were careless of the words; it made their pulses quicken and brightened their eyes, and the Parliament of Women was hushed, and the feet of all were drawn towards the house, and even the children ceased their shouting, and sat still to hear. For such singing had they never heard and never dreamed of. What Valentine sang, in fact, was a ditty called the 'Kerry Dance.'

While she sang there came down the street,

not arm in arm, because they were deadly enemies, yet walking together because they loved each other, a certain Assistant Priest—formerly he would have been called the Curate—and a certain young General Practitioner, Medicine-man, Doctor, a person skilled in Physic, Anatomy, Botany, Biology, and all kinds of learned things. Both were young as yet, and poor. I know not which of the two was the more pragmatic, pedantic, and conceited; whether the Assistant Priest, who professed to know the secret ways of the Almighty, and pretended to be entrusted with the most tremendous powers, and measured Law, Order, and Humanity by the little tape of his little sect—he was a Ritualist person and impudently called his Sect 'the Church:' or he who knew all about Bacteria and Mikrokokkos and Evolution and Protoplasm, and didn't want any Church at all, and saw no soft place anywhere in his stupendous intellect where he could possibly want any religion.

'Oh Lord!' cried the Doctor, who only believed in himself, and therefore generally called upon the Lord.

'Dear me!' said the Assistant Priest, who

didn't believe in himself at all, and therefore swore by his own name.

'This is very wonderful,' said the Doctor, listening to the Voice.

'Oh! To think of it,
Oh! To dream of it,'

sang Valentine.

'This,' said the Assistant Priest, 'is the most wonderful thing I have ever heard. What a Voice!'

He left the Doctor and followed the Voice up the stairs, and found himself unexpectedly in a room filled with four girls, at sight of whom he turned and fled, conscious of intrusion.

But the people in the street were clapping their hands.

Said Lotty, 'Oh! it's lovely. But they want another.'

Valentine laughed and sang another. The singing quite restored her. This time she sang 'Phillis is my only joy.'

The people held their breath while they listened. When it was over Valentine shut down the window, to show that the performance was finished.

'It's all very well,' said Melenda, once more

conscious of inferiority; 'anyone could do it if she had been taught.'

'Anyone,' said Valentine.

'But oh!' said Lotty; 'all the same it's wonderful.'

'There were four girls in the room,' said the Assistant Priest, 'and one was lying on the bed. And the one who was singing looked somehow—but it was rather dark—like a lady. I felt I had no business there, so I came away.'

'Of course she was a lady,' said the Doctor. 'Nobody but a lady could sing like that. Well; I hope she'll come again. What a mistake you fellows made when you turned the women out of your choirs! By Jove! That girl's singing would actually make the men go to church!'

What the Assistant Priest replied I shall not report. As he lost his temper every day with the Doctor—they met every day—it would not be fair to set down in cold blood the things he habitually said on these occasions. One may, however, record briefly that he had now began with, 'I *do* think'—which is the London clerical equivalent for a well-known Yorkshire

idiom; sometimes he added, 'I *must* say.' But that was only when the controversy raged long and bitterly, and when this, or its equivalent, in nautical language, or the bargee dialect, or the London patois, was absolutely necessary.

CHAPTER VI.

BEHIND ST. LUKE'S.

'Oh, Claude!' Valentine opened her door and came out to meet him when he knocked on the Sunday morning. 'I never thought I should be so happy to see anybody! And you are ten minutes late, sir. To be sure, you have not been all alone in Ivy Lane for three days.'

'The place is truly awful, Valentine. It looks even worse to-day than when we came here with Violet.'

Certainly Ivy Lane has a way of looking more mournfully shabby and dirty on Sunday mornings in summer than on any other morning in the week; perhaps this is because there are more potsherds, mouldy crusts, bruised and decaying fruit, bits of paper, cabbage stalks, potato peelings, broken pipes, plugs of tobacco, and other drift and wreckage of life lying about

on that than on any other day. It was already past eleven, but very few people were stirring, and no one had yet taken a broom in hand or thrown a bucket of water over the flags. Lizzie and Melenda were not yet dressed; Lotty was lying on Valentine's bed in restful ease, not asleep, because it is foolish to sleep in moments free from pain. She had a book in her hands, but her thoughts were wandering away to the old times of the happy days in the little shop before the custom fell off; and she was a child again with poor impatient Tilly, and her father was proud of the shop, and her mother was happy in her husband and her children. For what sins, far back in the third or fourth generation of unknown and obscure ancestors, had Fate been so hard upon this poor draper of Goswell Road and his family?

'You are still alive, Valentine, and no one has——'

'No one has offered me the least incivility, Claude, except of course Melenda, who is still unforgiving.'

She looked as bright and as fresh as a young girl of twenty can be expected to look. Her long day's work had left no trace behind

except a little paleness of cheek, and perhaps a little shading below the eyes; standing among those dingy houses in her youth and grace and beauty she looked as Aphrodite herself might have shown had she imitated the Father of the Gods when he went visiting the slums, and called upon Baucis and Philemon in their squalid hut. She had been waiting for Claude a whole half-hour, quite ready for him, and 'with her Things on'—pretty, poetical, feminine locution! To mere man, a woman's dress is the setting and frame of beauty, the mysterious accompaniment of loveliness, a thing to be regarded with wonder and respect: but to superior woman it is but a collection of 'Things.' Such is the philosophic superiority of the sex, and so readily do they despise mere external trappings and outward show.

'It is a dreadful place,' Claude repeated. 'I am amazed that you dared to come here. Can you be happy in it?'

A most weak and feeble question. What is the use of asking a girl who is young, strong, beautiful, and relieved from the necessity of work, if she can make herself happy anywhere, and especially where she is entirely free? No

one knows, until he has witnessed it, the happiness which the young lady, even of the best regulated mind, feels when her movements are free and uncontrolled; and to think that, with their liberty yet to gain, women will fight for such vain shadows as female suffrage and a seat on a School Board! Besides which, Valentine was going to spend a whole morning in the company of a young man charming in many respects, but especially in this, that he believed himself to be her brother.

Happiness, again, is so uncertain a quality. Nobody, except a newly engaged couple, is often consciously happy. We do not recognise happiness until it has vanished; and then we lament, yet with pride, as those who have entertained a god unawares. A truly remarkable thing that all the world should ardently desire a possession which nobody understands until it has vanished. A certain ancient philosopher, after he had made an impromptu conundrum, or a double acrostic, upon this paradox, went away and elaborated a Treatise, now happily lost, on the 'Folly of Praying for Happiness.' I suppose that, even on this

Sunday morning, Valentine would hardly have confessed to perfect happiness.

'I am going,' she said, 'to take you for a walk. There are no parks in Hoxton, and there are no gardens or anything. I suppose there is no place in all London so far from any open space as Ivy Lane. So we can only walk about the streets. But when we are tired, I know of a beautiful churchyard—I found it the other day—where we can sit down and rest. A good many of the people are in bed still, because it is Sunday morning. Lying in bed saves breakfast; and, besides, it rests them. They get up, I believe, somewhere about dinner time. Melenda and Lizzie are in bed now, for instance. However, we shall find some of the people in the streets.'

For her own part Valentine had very little desire to study the People—with a capital initial. She came to Hoxton solely in order to get acquainted with the members of her own particular family, the Monuments: and especially with Melenda Monument. But she was naturally curious about the new strange life she found there. Curiosity has led to a good many remarkable things: to the conversation with

the Serpent and the tasting of the Apple; to the breaking of all laws—human and divine, moral and meddlesome, just and unjust; to the acquisition of all the knowledge that has been acquired, and to the growth and development of sympathy. She was by no means a Philanthropist. Her interests, like those of all healthy-minded young people, were as yet chiefly confined to those whom she knew and loved. Her affections as yet limited her sympathies; she had no desire to deduce and to lay down general laws concerning the manners and customs or the instincts of what we feelingly call the 'Lower Classes'—philanthropy does sometime cover such a beautiful contempt for its objects. She just began by being interested in a group of three working girls, from whom she was rapidly learning the one lesson most worth learning, namely, that the People are, in all essentials, exactly the same as the Other People. There are not, in fact, in this any more than in any other country, two races, but one; and the best way of acquiring an exhaustive and scientific knowledge of that one race is to sit before a looking-glass for a long time and look at it. This is really a most valuable maxim, and the

sooner it is generally accepted and acted upon the better for everybody, particularly for those who are ridden by Fads, Fancies, and Old Men of the Sea. Women, for some unknown reason, understand this law better than men, and it is the cause not only why they make better nurses, but also why they are harder in their dealings with the poor and needy. Those who love sweet sentimentality and the pleasures of imagination should not try to understand too many laws of humanity.

Valentine was brimful of things to talk about; but when a lady lives altogether in one room, she cannot very well use it as a salon. This difficulty is generally, by the ladies of Ivy Lane, on the evenings when they are At Home, overcome by receiving their friends upon the kerbstone or by sitting on the doorsteps. Valentine, perhaps in ignorance of this custom, preferred to wander about the streets, and led Claude forth into labyrinthine Hoxton. The city has been, it is true, laid out something like an American town, with parallel streets and cross streets at right angles; but it has happily preserved some of the old winding-ways which were formerly lanes between hedgerows, across

fields, and among orchards of plum, cherry, apple, and pear. The lanes remain—some think that Dædalus once lived in Hoxton, about the time when Pythagoras was teaching at Cambridge—but the hedgerows are gone, and houses and shops have taken their place. Valentine piloted Claude among the winding courts, but first she led him into Hoxton Street, where on a Sunday morning there is always a great market held and all the shops are open. The roadway is covered with the carts of costers, and the pavement is crowded with those who stroll idly along, content to be doing nothing except to lean against something solid, pipe in mouth and hands in pocket. Valentine led the way with the air of an old acquaintance—a two days' old acquaintance—and as one, therefore, competent to become a cicerone. She showed Claude the streets, branching right and left, those where every room in every house is a workshop as well as a living-room and a sleeping-room, and those where every house contains a workshop. There are no other kinds of houses in Hoxton City. In one place she showed him a mysterious court, paved and broad and clean, consisting of little two-storied

houses inhabited by cobblers, repairers of umbrellas, sign-writers, feather-finishers, and the like, which is protected and beautified at either end by most magnificent iron gates, solid and splendid, richly worked, and fit for a duke's palace. How did these gates come to Hoxton?

Presently, in their walk, they came to a church, and they looked into it. The morning service was halfway through. Wonderful spectacle! There was not a single man in the church, except the two clergymen, the choir, and the churchwardens: yet everything set out in readiness for a full and enthusiastic congregation of the Faithful, with a lovely row of lighted candles in staring brass candlesticks where no lights were wanted, mocking the sunshine which poured through the windows, quite an extensive choir in surplices, and two officiating clergymen, and in one snug corner a place provided with a curtain and a chair—the whole forming the simple Properties necessary for a nice little Confessional. Sad indeed that Englishmen should be found to scoff and to stand upright and to think for themselves, and to speak words of derision about this innocent

little piece of furniture! Outside the church, benighted scoffers stood about in groups among the carts and the carrots, and even joked and actually laughed among each other; but not at the Church, nor at the Confessional-box, because they were perfectly, wholly, and completely ignorant and careless and indifferent about anything which might be going on within that building.

'This,' said Claude when they came out, 'reminds me of a procession on the stage where they have forgotten the spectators.'

'It is like a concert,' said Valentine, 'where there is no audience. Isn't it dreadful, Claude, for nobody to go to church?'

'It doesn't seem quite as if the Church had got a strong grip of the people about these parts, does it?'

Then they left that street, and presently stood upon a bridge and gazed upon the romantic waters of the canal which parts Hoxton from Kingsland; and then along St. John's Road, which is a boulevard less popular than Hoxton Street, yet loved by the quiet and the meditative. At the end of the street stands a massive church—one of those churches built

in the middle of the last century, with a vast portico of granite pillars and a white spire which is big and high and yet not beautiful. They looked into that church too. There were no confessional cribs and no candles; no one was mumbling; the clergyman, on the contrary, was speaking out plain and clear, and the service preserved something of the ancient severity. In that church there could be counted no fewer than twenty-five families—father, mother, and children—all worshipping together as they should, and making a grand total of at least a hundred and twenty people, without counting the preacher and the pew-opener. This is very satisfactory indeed, because the parish contains only seventeen thousand six hundred. One churchgoer out of every hundred and fifty! It makes one hopeful, because it reminds one of the Early Church in Rome, as depicted by M. Renan.

Then they walked down Pitfield Street and thought no more about the people but selfishly considered each other, and Valentine narrated all her adventures, and told of Melenda's stubborn independence, and of Lotty, and of Lizzie, and her own experiment of a long

day's work. Only she concealed her great discovery.

'You must never do that again, Valentine,' said Claude, referring to the day's work. 'Promise me you will not.'

'I do not think I could. But oh! think of those poor girls working every day and all day long, and for so little! Is it just and right? Who is to blame for it, Claude?'

'The system, I suppose, is to blame—whatever the system may be. I have never considered the subject of the English Industries, except when Sam forces his own opinions upon one.'

'But it concerns you, Claude; and Melenda is your—our sister.'

'Why do they go on doing such work, I wonder? There are other things to do. But Melenda will not brook any interference. How can one help a girl who will not accept any help? What can I do?'

Valentine made no reply. She was disappointed. Claude did not respond to her own enthusiasm. To him it was no new thing to hear that working girls are disgracefully paid and cruelly worked. It is, alas! no new thing

to any of us. We hear about them every day, yet the thing goes on.

'Melenda might go into a shop, or she might go into some kind of service. Anything,' said Claude, 'would be better than what she does now. But she will take no help from me.'

'You might as well put a zebra in harness as Melenda into any kind of service. Can nothing be done to get them better work?'

'I don't know. I will consult with Sam if you like.'

'No, Claude, I don't want you to consult with Sam. Consult with yourself. With all your knowledge and cleverness you need not stoop to take advice of a Board School master.'

'My knowledge has not taught me how to deal with work-girls.' Here he noticed a change in Valentine's face. 'I have disappointed you, Valentine. I knew I should.'

'No, Claude. But I thought—I hoped—oh! I am so sorry, Claude, for those poor girls.'

'Show me, then, some way to help them.'

At this point they reached the junction of

Pitfield Street and Old Street. Here Valentine turned to the right, leading her companion past the old wells of Dame Annis le Clair and the Peerless Pool—but they were both, unhappily, ignorant of their historical associations—past the great Hospital named after the Physician Apostle, where certain Demoniacs, unhappy ones of the earth, wait for their release from the prison of unreason—it is brought to them by a Personage figured generally as a skeleton with a scythe. Then they passed a church which boasts the most amazing spire conceivable. In the whole of the habitable world there is to be found none other like unto it. Country people and strangers flock in multitudes to Old Street only to gaze upon its miracle of ugliness. Travellers are said to cross the Atlantic with no other purpose than to visit this, the ugliest church in the whole world. Why not? Any street might be proud of owning the ugliest thing that ever was built, and if people willingly face the perils of the deep to visit the most beautiful church in the world, why should they not incur the same risks for the sake of the most ugly?

At the back of the church there was

formerly a vast burying-ground, because when St. Luke's was built, a hundred and fifty years ago, the ground hereabouts was cheap. It is not venerable, as men generally reckon that quality in churchyards, by age, for the church itself has only baptised and buried five generations of mortal men and women. But it is venerable because here lie at rest the once aching bones of thousands who in their lives knew no rest. Here you will not find the remains of any great or illustrious men ; they are all the bones of toilers ; their names and histories are clean forgotten—even the histories of those whose heirs, in their pride, had the name and date of birth and death carved upon a headstone. The stones themselves still stand, ranged round the walls and within the railings, but no man readeth them any more, and if one doth perchance read them, the names, even to the oldest parishioner, awaken no memory. They have long ceased to bury in this Acre of the Lord ; the funeral verses of hope and resignation are no longer heard ; there is no more rattling of ashes upon ashes and dust to dust, and they have now laid out the ground for the children's play and a place of rest and

meditation for the old. The graves are levelled; the headstones are placed back two and three deep within the railings, where the garden mould covers them up within an inch or two of their deathless names, and so they stand or lean, with only the inscriptions visible, and look as if they were not churchyard stones at all, but the stone faces of the very original holders and possessors of the ground, stonily gazing without power either of spoken remonstrance or of approval upon the present use of their sleeping place, yet so great is the power of expression in a headstone that one can plainly distinguish in some of them satisfaction; and in some, doubt; and in some, stern disapprobation. Two or three of the old railed tombs are left upon the grass to serve, perhaps, as the skeleton at the Feast. As for the ground itself, it is laid out in four fair lawns, each with a round bed of shrubs and a narrow bed of flowers. In the middle the ground has been artificially lowered, and one descends by a step or two into an area where they have erected a pedestal. Why a pedestal with nothing on it should have been put up passeth man's understanding: but this is the

taste of St. Luke's, and we have only to bow before it. There are, one is pleased to remark, seats in plenty; and the walks are asphalted and easy for the foot of age; and they have planted trees which will perhaps some day grow tall and be umbrageous.

This morning there were in the garden a goodly number of old men and women with a great quantity of little children. The men sat together, and the women sat together, and they talked after their kind, which is a querulous kind, because old age is a term of life only to be represented in a favourable light by those who know how to conceal things and are rich enough to make themselves comfortable. These old people hear the voice of the grasshopper continually; besides, they all have rheumatism, and they do not attempt to conceal that they hate the voice of the grasshopper and abhor rheumatic pains.

'Let us sit down,' said Valentine.

'The problem of Melenda,' Claude began sententiously, 'is the great problem of labour. It is nothing less than the problem of the age.'

'Then solve it, Claude. In the old days a

knight was sent forth to kill a dragon or a loathly worm.'

'Anybody could kill a dragon.'

'Or to find the Holy Grail——'

'If one were to find it now, people would first dispute its authenticity, and then they would stick it in a museum as an archæological curiosity.'

'But this is a task of much more interest than a doubtful relic. Is it possible, Claude, that you have never thought about Melenda and her life?'

'Seriously, Valentine, I never have. Do not reproach me with selfishness. Her own independence is one cause, and then we have always been accustomed to go each his own way. Sam goes one way, Joe another, Melenda another. The only way that I can think of to help such a girl, so fiercely independent, is to alter the system itself, and that so radically that these miserable wages shall be made impossible. And it has never occurred to me that I should try to do this. Had I the lever of Archimedes I could not do it.'

'Yet I think—if I were you, Claude—I think that I would try,' she replied slowly.

'I have read books and treatises on Rent, Production, and so forth. Everybody reads these things, especially a barrister who wants all the information that he can get from every side. But certainly not with a view of inventing or preaching any new system.'

'Never mind the books, Claude. Look at the people, not the theories. Here is our own sister, Melenda. This poor thing is condemned to a life that is only better than a slave's because she thinks she has kept her independence and because she cannot be tied up and flogged. Our own sister, Claude! She is miserably fed and wretchedly clothed; she is always half-starving and she goes in pitiful rags. Her very pride and her independence make her misery cry out the louder for your help. Your own sister—our sister. And she is so brave and so fierce. Our honour is concerned, Claude; we must try; if we cannot help her any other way, we will help her by altering the System, even if we have to call in Sam, and all become Socialists. It is for Violet's sake and mine, Claude, as well as your own. How can we endure to live in happiness while she lives in such misery?'

'Yes, Valentine, yes.' Claude was moved by her emotion. 'You are right. It concerns me, you, Violet—all of us. And I am a selfish creature. But—what am I to do?'

'I do not know,' she replied impatiently. 'What is the use of education and knowledge if they cannot be used to find out things? Have you become a Fellow of Trinity and a great scholar and a lawyer only for your own advancement, Claude?'

Claude made no reply, for, you see, his own personal advancement was exactly what he had always considered the ultimate end and object of any success he might make in life. He had always put the thing to himself from this point of view; he intended to get on, to climb as high as he could, and to do the best he might for himself. He had climbed already from the washerwoman's cottage on the edge of Hackney Marsh to the Trinity Combination Room, which is a good way up the hill, and he was continually thirsting for opportunities to climb higher still. When he took the prizes at school; when he carried off scholarships at College; when he stood third in the First Class of the Classical Tripos, he felt himself answering

the end of his existence, and justifying Lady Mildred's sagacity in picking him out from among so many. His own advancement! Why yes—his own, and no other's.

'Do not be angry with me, Claude,' she pleaded. 'Only this morning, before you came, while I was thinking of these poor girls, something I had read somewhere came into my mind. It was to the effect that all great things are done by strong men; each thing by one strong man, who knows what he means and is strong enough to make other men work for him. If that is true, we should be always praying for a strong man.'

'I suppose we should.'

'Why should not you, Claude, be the strong man?'

'Because I am not a strong man, and because my own work has been laid down for me on other lines.'

'That is only your own work for yourself.'

'Yes—yes, of course,' he replied a little uneasily. 'But then it is work which leaves no time for anything else.'

Suppose you have chosen deliberately the

work which seems to suit you best, and the goal which seems desirable above all others as the noblest and highest; suppose you have good reason to believe that you will succeed; suppose in fact that you are perfectly satisfied with yourself, and that suddenly you are shaken to your very centre by the information that your aims are merely personal and selfish; that you are called upon to undertake certain other work which may cause you to change your whole plan of life; that everything you value must be abandoned if you obeyed that call;—this was the new light which flashed suddenly upon Claude's brain on that July morning as he sat among the ashes of the obscure dead and among the houses of the obscure living. Dead and living, he belonged to them; they were his own forefathers who lay sleeping beneath his feet; they were his sisters who worked in the houses around him. He belonged to them. But never before had it occurred to him that he might work for them instead of for himself.

'Seriously, Valentine, I do not think you understand what it is you propose. Do you really mean that I should set myself to finding

out a remedy for evils which have defied every professor of political economy?'

'I mean that seriously.'

'But what am I, Valentine, that I should discover an answer to the questions which have baffled all the greybeards?'

'Perhaps the answer must come from the young. Oh! do you think that Paul waited till he was grey before he began to speak?'

Sometimes it seems to me as if Valentine struck here upon a great and remarkable truth. We have perhaps been all along asking too much of the old. It is perhaps from the young, while their hearts are full of generous emotions and unselfish sacrifice is still possible, that an answer to all great questions may be expected. The world belongs in fact to the young; not only the world to enjoy but the world to fight; the future is in the shaping of their hands; theirs is the inheritance; they are the princes and the governors, the Sheikhs and the Emirs, the Generals and the Captains. The old may go on accumulating and storing, relating and writing; that is properly their department; they are historians. As for new and great ideas, they are too much for them; when one

such idea is conceived and one such great scheme is brought forth, the old philosopher, the veteran economist, the defender of Vested interests, the man of sixty-year-old ideas, will very naturally bring out his watering-pot and turn the rose on to that idea, and point out the real wickedness of the world, the selfishness of man, and the unremitting watchfulness required by this project, all of which render the scheme impracticable and impossible. Then the young men will use much the same language as that employed by certain unlucky village children towards a certain Prophet of old, but with a different conclusion to the story. For in my story the children would kill the bears.

'Everything,' said Claude, 'up to the present has been driving me farther from my own people; even, I thought, the recovery of my sister. It will be strange if she should take me back to them. Let me think, Valentine. I acknowledge the obligation, but I declare that I can do nothing. Why should I waste myself in beating the air?'

For Valentine did not see, which was clear to himself, that such an effort, to be serious, would require nothing short of a man's whole

work with all his thoughts and all his strength. And even then he would most likely fail. Yet some small success might be effected. And the thing touched his honour. His own sister —not his sister in the Common bonds of humanity—but the child of his own mother, was one of those who lay tied and bound by strong chains in the dungeons of Castle Famine, held there by the great Bully Giant Competition. His own sister. But what could he do for her, except—and that perhaps in vain—give her all that he had? And so, like the other young man who had great possessions, he was minded to go sorrowfully away. For his own possessions were neither of silver nor of gold, but the far more precious things of knowledge and wit and understanding—the things which would lead him to honour and distinction and men's praise in the brave days before him.

At this point of their discourse there came ambling along the asphalte an old lady. Valentine seemed to know her, but could not recollect where she had seen her—a curious old lady to look at, because she walked delicately and gave herself airs such as might become a young and beautiful woman. There

were not now remaining many traces of former beauty, but as much perhaps as one expects after seventy years of a life not devoted wholly to the contemplation of things spiritual. She was dressed in a frock which looked ridiculously girlish, and as she walked she rolled her eyes about as if to watch the effect produced by her appearance.

'Ho!' said this dear old thing, stopping before Claude and Valentine. 'Ho! Indeed! The young lady of the first floor back'—Valentine remembered her now. She was the old woman she had seen dancing all by herself: 'The young lady with the new furniture'—she had inspected it through the keyhole. 'I hope you are very well this morning, my dear; and I hope you are as happy as you are beautiful. Your lovely dress matches your lovely complexion, and if you didn't make it yourself, it was made in Regent Street, and cost three guineas if a penny, simple as it looks. Your pretty boots match your pretty little feet, and if they were not given to you they cost you a guinea a pair, and your gloves were four-and-six. Quite right. Quite right. Be as happy as you are beautiful, my dear—while your time

lasts. Youth is the time for happiness. I was happy myself once.'

Neither her words nor her appearance produced an impression of the straitest and most narrow virtue.

'I am very well, thank you,' said Valentine coldly.

'With your young man. My dear, I said you had a young man. And he a gentleman. I said that nothing short of a gentleman would do for you. And he knows how a girl should be dressed, he does. Very proper too, my dear. I had the same sentiments as you when I was young.'

'Let us go, Claude,' said Valentine rising.

Claude gave the old crone a coin, and she ambled away with a parting smile and a nod, very terrifying to behold.

'A reminiscence,' said Claude, 'or a survival of something in the theatrical way, I should say.'

'If I thought,' said Valentine, 'that I could ever come to look like that old woman —it is not her age and her baldness and her poverty, but her terrible eyes—I would go straight into a nunnery at once and hide myself.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROFESSOR OF YIDDISH.

'I've been doing up the room for father,' Lizzie explained. It was Sunday evening, and about nine o'clock, when Valentine came home and met her coming out of the ground-floor room. 'I do it every night before I go out.'

'And you sit with him sometimes, I suppose?'

'No, I ain't fit company for father. He don't want me. He was a gentleman once, and he talks proper.'

'Have you got no mother or sisters, or anybody besides your father, Lizzie?'

'There's Melenda and Lotty. That's all I've got. Before Melenda taught me to sew I used to be a step girl.'

'What's that?'

'It's like this, you know. Some people—not here, but Kingsland way, over the Canal—

like to have their doorsteps cleaned once a week. That's what I did for 'em, at a penny a step, and sometimes three-ha'pence. When Melenda taught me to sew I gave up that. It was only a low trade.'

'Where is your mother?'

'She died long ago. There's only father, and he can't do nothing for me.'

If he knows how to 'talk proper,' Valentine thought, he might at least have taught his daughter the same art. She remembered the tall old man with stooping shoulders who took off his hat to her. Doubtless this was Lizzie's father.

'Is your father so very poor?'

'Dreadful poor,' said the girl. 'He was a gentleman once, but that was a long time ago.'

'Do you think he would let me call upon him?'

'I don't know.' She opened the door. 'Go in first and ask afterwards. Father, here's Melenda's sister says may she come in?'

'May she come in?' The old man raised his head slowly and repeated the words. Then he rose and bowed, offering his chair, the

only chair in the room. There was no candle, but the gas-lamp in the street outside gave sufficient light to show that the room was furnished with a wooden bed covered with a rug, a table, a chair, a washing-stand, and a candlestick. There seemed to be literally nothing else at all. Strange to say, there was not even a pipe or the smell of tobacco.

'When a young lady comes to see me,' he said politely, 'the least I can do is to offer her chair. Pray do me the honour to be seated.'

The manner and the voice and the words of the man were inconceivably out of keeping with the squalid place in which he lived. Valentine accepted the chair and sat down, wondering who this man might be. Lizzie stood at the open door watching her father with undisguised pride. It was long since she had witnessed any of these Reminiscences of Polite Society. 'Once he was a gentleman.' Why, thought Valentine, is he now a ragged gentleman, and how is it that he has suffered his daughter to grow up without any manners at all, since his own are so good?

'You have been kind to my daughter,' he said, still standing. 'Nobody, so far as I know,

has ever before been kind to her, not even her father.'

'You can't help that,' said Lizzie loyally. 'It ain't your fault, father.'

'Therefore I thank you,' he added, without noticing the interruption. 'My daughter is a work-girl, and is naturally more accustomed to ill-treatment than to kindness.'

'But I have done nothing for Lizzie.'

'You have given her dinner and supper, and you have spoken kindly to her. It is something that the girl should find anybody to give her anything. Yesterday evening I heard you singing upstairs. You have a very beautiful voice. I could play and sing myself formerly. But it is thirty-five years since I played last.'

'Have you forgotten how to play?'

'I have not played anything for thirty-five years,' he repeated.

'And now you live here all alone.' It was a weak thing to say, but one cannot always find epigrams, and besides, Valentine was still occupied in wondering what this strange thing might mean—the grey-headed, ragged man who lived alone in so miserable a room, and his daughter, who seemed to have nothing to do

with her father except to look into his rooms once a day—a man in such a place who had the unmistakable manners and language of a gentleman, and the other who was nothing at all but the London work-girl—rough and ignorant, and ill-mannered.

'As you see,' he answered, 'quite alone.'

He sat down on the bed, his hands joined over his knees, looking at his visitor with large and lustrous eyes. His clothes were dilapidated to the last degree—his coat in rags, the elbows in holes, his trousers patched at the knees apparently by an amateur, and his boots gaping at the toes. He was picturesque in his rags. Lying on the bed was a tattered Inverness cape, and on the table an old felt hat.

A broken-down gentleman. It was apparent in his voice, in his speech, and in his carriage. By what unlucky accident had this poor gentleman got down so low?

Girls like Valentine are not accustomed to read a man's past history in his face, but she could discern that on this man's face there was not the seal of drink and vice. It was a face with refinement stamped upon the high white forehead, and gentleness in the blue eyes which

met Valentine's steadily and openly, though with a strange sadness such as she had never before seen even in pictures.

'Nobody,' said Valentine, 'can be quite alone in the world. You must have some friends or relations.'

'Most men have. But a singular accident happened to me—a very singular accident'—he raised his voice with a strange smile—'about thirty-five years ago. All my relations died suddenly. All the relations I had in the world and all the friends in one day. There is not a single person now in the whole world who ever asks if I am living: not one who cares to ask me or wishes me back again. I have passed quite away, even out of remembrance: even out of the prayers of those who once loved me. For they are all dead. They all died on one day.'

'And have you made no new friends all this time?'

'None. Those who are so poor as myself make no friends. Twenty years ago I found a woman about the streets as poor and as miserable as myself. I made her my wife, and we shared our misery. Perhaps hers was lessened.

Lizzie is her daughter, but she is dead. I have no friends.'

'Poor man!'

'I have not complained.'

'Perhaps if you were to go "back again," as you said, you might find some of your old friends. They did not all die, I am quite sure.'

'Yes, they did. Every one. It would be odd, too, to go back to the old world just as I am now, and if they were living, to offer them my hand. Sometimes I have thought of it. But there—what does it matter? As for the past, we live in the present and the past lives in us. Yes'—his voice sank—'the past never dies: every moment lives for ever. That is the dreadful thing. Why, even the souls of the forgiven must go about for ever with hanging heads and shameful foreheads. Always,' he repeated, 'with shameful foreheads.'

This was the man who had 'done something,' Valentine remembered.

Lizzie at this point, finding the conversation just a note or two above her, went out and shut the door softly.

'You have your daughter.'

'Yes. But I can do nothing for her. You wonder that she is what she is. Young lady, there is a level—I have reached it and stand upon it—which the thoughts and habits of such as yourself would turn into a hell. Better for the child of the gutter to grow up in the gutter.'

'You must not call Lizzie a child of the gutter. She is your child, and she is a pretty girl, and has refinement in her face if not in her manners.'

'Let her remain where she is and what she is. Then perhaps she will never understand the nature of her inheritance.'

'What inheritance?'

'Lizzie is a great heiress; she will inherit the whole of my property if she ever finds out of what it consists.'

'Your property?'

'The accumulations of thirty-five years, invested at Compound Interest in Shame and Dishonour.' The words were strong, but he spoke quite calmly. 'It is so great a property that I cannot bear to die and leave it behind me. I should like to rob her of it, and have it buried in my pauper's grave with me. It is

all my own making, this Property. I am quite a self-made man. When I began I had nothing of it. Yet that does not avail. I must die and leave it behind me. A man may take into the grave nothing of his labour which he may carry away in his hand. What profit hath he that he hath laboured for the wind?'

'You read the Bible still,' said Valentine starting.

'No, I read nothing. There is not a Bible or any book at all in the room: but I remember something of what I used to read. These are the words of the Preacher, who said many wise things. It was he who praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. I too, who am yet alive, praise the dead more than the living. It must be a beautiful thing to be already dead. There the prisoners rest together: they hear not the voice of the oppressor: the small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master.'

He said all this in measured tones, and without the least passion or sign of emotion.

'You have no books. Can I lend you any?'

'No, I do not want to read.'

'Do you always sit here doing nothing?'

'Always. It is my happiness to do nothing. Then I can live the past over again, up to a certain point, and I can follow the impossible future. I know,' he went on, 'that you would like to be helping me. Ladies who come to such places as this think they can set everything right by a few acts of kindness. I thank you, but you cannot help me. Look round the room; you see that I have reduced my life to the simplest form possible. Here is a place to lie down upon, with a rug to keep me warm; here is a roof, and here are walls; a chair, a table, a candlestick, a washing-basin—what more does a man want? I get my breakfast and my supper at a coffee-stall. When I can afford dinner I get it at a coffee-house. I neither drink nor smoke tobacco. I have no other wants than a certain amount of food and a place to lie down.'

'You are a philosopher.'

'No; a philosopher is contented, but I am not. I live in this wretched way because I have no choice. You are curious to learn how I live. Very well, I will tell you. It is an honest way. I know two or three languages

—German and French and Italian. I learned them when I was young. I also—by accident—once learned some Hebrew. I have since learned a little Polish. I know where German immigrants congregate, and I write letters for them, especially for the Polish and German Jews—all kinds of letters, begging letters, letters asking for employment—at twopence each, or whatever I can get for a letter. They tell me their wants in their own language, which is generally Yiddish—that is to say, Polish and German and Hebrew mixed. Sometimes I do well; sometimes I do badly. Very often I do not make as much as a shilling a day. I pay three-and-sixpence a week for my room, and I can live on half a crown—fourpence a day. That is all; that is my life.'

'Your present life.'

'Yes, my present life. Young lady,' he raised himself upright and sighed heavily, 'there are some lives, some unhappy lives, across which Fate draws, right in the middle of them, a thick black line. My life has been so divided.'

The thick black line meant, perhaps, some kind of failure or bankruptcy, Valentine con-

jectured, such as reduced Lotty's father to the profession of roader. Yet he spoke of Shame and Disgrace, and he was generally supposed to have 'done something.'

'I wish I could help you in some way,' she said. 'Let me try for your daughter's sake.'

'You say this because you are a young lady, and generous. But I want only what I have told you—food and a sleeping-place, and obscurity. Stay, you can do something for me. Will you sing to me?'

Valentine considered a little. Then she joined her hands and sang to him. She sang, 'He shall feed His flock,' perhaps because it was Sunday evening.

'Thank you,' said the man when she had finished. 'It is thirty-five years since last I heard that sung.'

'May I come again and talk to you sometimes?'

'Yes, if you please. But it is not right for you to come here. Besides, I might get to look for your coming, and that would interfere with my dream.'

'Your dream?'

'While I sit here alone in the evening I am

possessed by a dream. It is the dream of my old life, carried on just as it should have been. I follow myself in my dream step by step and year by year through the career which might have been mine, had it not been for that—that thick black line. If you were to destroy that dream, you would destroy my only pleasure. Then I should become discontented, and dream of revenge instead. That would be bad and foolish for me; first, because I never shall get my revenge, and next, because thinking of it calls up the devil, who makes me fall into a rage and then claws at my heart and tries to drag it out of my body. One of these days he will succeed, and then the doctor will say I died of angina pectoris, because it is not scientific to say that a man died of a raging devil. If it were not for that I should dream of revenge perpetually.'

'Oh, but,' said Valentine, in the amiable manner of one who has no enemies to forgive, 'revenge is such a poor thing to desire, and besides, it never satisfies.'

'I don't know,' the man replied. 'Simple killing does not satisfy. But something like the Eternal Revenge of Ugo Foscolo, you know,

something to go back to at intervals, and when the old rage rises again in your heart like a flame. Ah!' he clapped his hand to his heart, 'it begins again.' He gasped, and held his breath as one in sharp and sudden pain. Then he pulled out of his pocket a little bottle, and the room became charged with the faint scent of ether. 'I must not talk any more about it. Sometimes I think that for ever and for ever I shall be punished for my sin by this flaming fire in my heart, and the burning desire for revenge. Well, I will not complain. Hush! Do not talk to me any more. Let me get back quickly to my dream.'

She turned to go. Just then there came the sound of steps and a kind of scuffle outside the door.

It was caused by the old lady of the back room, who was being dragged, pushed, or assisted to her own room by a young man dressed in a black frock-coat and a tall hat. The old lady was apparently unwilling to go.

'Is she ill?' asked Valentine.

'No; in these cases the illness follows the attack. She will be ill enough to-morrow. Come, old lady, off you go to bed.'

The patient began to sing, and even Valentine, in spite of her inexperience, was able to understand that her illness was caused by nothing else than a rush of alcohol to her head. In fact, the poor old creature was tipsy. She had been spending on gin the shilling which Claude gave her in the morning. The man who was helping her got her into her room with a vigorous effort, and came out, shutting the door upon her.

'There,' he said, 'she's all right now. You'll hear her making a little noise perhaps, but not much, and she'll soon be asleep. Somebody has given her gin, and I suppose she'd had nothing to eat all day. The boys were chivying her about the street, so I brought her home. She will sleep it off.' Then he looked into the front room. 'Good evening, Mr. Lane. No more attacks, I hope?'

'I had one just now, Doctor. I began to think——'

'Well, then, you mustn't think. I warned you before. If you get excited you'll just kill yourself. How's the Dream getting on?'

'It is working itself out slowly, Doctor. Slowly the Career approaches its appointed end. A Deanery has been offered him, but he has refused it. A man of such eloquence and learning can't be shelved with a Deanery! A Bishopric is the least that he will take. Sometimes there are thoughts about an Archbishopric. But I doubt whether there will be time on account of my thinking, you know, and the rages I fall into——'

'You must not fall into rages.'

'The other day I seemed to hear his voice. But it was only someone talking outside with this young lady. Yet it was his own voice—exactly his own voice.'

'I have warned you, remember. Good-night!'

The Doctor shut the door, and turned abruptly to Valentine.

'Well,' he asked, 'you are the young lady that was singing the other evening. What do you think about us?'

He might just as well have asked what Valentine thought about humanity in the abstract. She replied to that effect.

'I don't suppose you have come here

without an object,' he went on. 'You have got something at work in your brain. It is charity or religion or humanity, I suppose. Whatever it is, if you want information come to me. I know all the people about here.'

He had a rugged face; his cheeks were without colour, as often happens to those who have lived always in the streets of a great city; he was neither tall nor short, rather a thin man, about thirty years of age; but he had a big head. His eyes were deep-set under shaggy eyebrows—quick earnest eyes; his forehead was square, and his nose was large, rough hewn and distinctly ugly; his dark hair was parted at the side, and had already begun to 'go' at the temple; he carried his head a little on one side habitually. It is a mode which suggests a thoughtful disposition.

'Thank you,' said Valentine.

'You will want to know a good deal, I dare say. Very good then. To save you trouble.' He spoke in a quick jerky way as if he was wanted elsewhere, which was in fact always the case with him. 'Do we go to church? We do not. Do we revere the institutions of our ancestors? We do not. Have we any

respect for rank and dignity? Not a bit. Do we care for anything but meat and drink and warmth and ease? We do not. Are we dangerous? Not so long as we are in regular work. Do we save our money? Not a mag. For whom do we vote? For the Radical, because he promises to tear things down. What is our political programme? The abolition of Church and Lords. Why? Because we think it will raise wages and lower the price of beer.'

'Thank you,' said Valentine. 'But I am not likely to inquire into the politics of the people.'

'Do we, then, yearn for Art? No, we do not. Do we love things beautiful? We don't even know what beauty means.'

'I do not expect to find Art here.'

'Are, then, our morals good? They are not. Have we any virtues at all? A few. We are tolerably honest; we are generous when we have any money, and we stand by each other when we are in trouble: man by man, woman by woman, and girl by girl.'

'Girl by girl?'

'Because,' he explained, irreverently,

'there is none other that fighteth for them, as your Prayer Book says, but only they themselves. So they stand by each other. There's a magnificent example in this very house upstairs.'

'Thank you very much. Good-night.' She moved towards the staircase, but he stopped her.

'One minute,' he said. 'I mean what I say. They tell me you are staying here. It is a queer place for a young lady to take lodgings in. Got a little pocket Gospel of your own to run, perhaps?'

'No, I am quite contented with the old Gospel.'

'Come to do good, as they call it? Well, you mean the best, I dare say. Don't do more harm than you can help. I'm always somewhere about the place if you want me. Good-night.'

He nodded his head familiarly, without the usual ceremony of lifting his hat, and hurried away.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOTTY'S FOOLISH DREAM.

After her two days' rest, Lotty ought in common decency to have shown some signs of improvement, if not of complete recovery. That she did not was only part of the well-known ingratitude of the poor. You may give them a lift over a bad bit, and they go on stumbling into worse bits: the sick woman basely and ungratefully develops more alarming symptoms and the man out of work continues to meet with new disappointments, so that where you began with a helping hand you must either maintain a pensioner or leave your patient in a worse plight than you found him.

I do not think that Lotty meant to be ungrateful; she would have preferred, I am quite sure, strength to weakness and health to pain, but she did have a very bad night on Sunday, and when on Monday morning Valen-

tine looked in she found the girl in a low way. One bunch of grapes and two days' rest, and a real, not a phantom, dinner on each day, were, you see, insufficient by themselves to meet the case. Valentine thought of what the old man below had said about ladies thinking to set everything right with a few acts of kindness. Even a bunch of hothouse grapes, at four shillings a pound, is not enough to repair the mischief wrought by eight long years of privation and hard work. Valentine might as well have tried to restore her youth to the old lady on the ground-floor back with a box of violet powder. Acts of kindness are not without their uses, but they cannot actually cure disease.

Lotty was lying on her back, pale and with closed eyes. The two girls were standing by the bedside frightened.

'She's awful bad,' said Lizzie. 'She's been bad all night. It isn't that she's hungry, because yesterday was Sunday and there was a bit of meat. You can speak to her if you like: she isn't asleep.'

'Don't try to speak, Lotty. We will carry you into the other room. It is quieter and the

bed is easier. We will all three carry you.' Melenda turned her shoulder with an expressive gesture. 'Melenda, are you so proud that you cannot even bear to see your friend relieved?'

'Do what you like for her,' said Melenda. Then she burst into tears of jealous rage at her own impotence. 'You shan't do anything for me. Oh, Lotty!' she flung her arms over her friend. 'I can't do anything for you, my dear, and I thought I was to do everything. I'm no use to you when you want my use the most. And now you're going to be helped by a stranger.'

Valentine said nothing, and presently Melenda left off crying, and consoled herself by assuming the command in the matter of carrying Lotty.

The other room was certainly quieter and cooler, and the bed was not so hard. And then they sent for the doctor.

It was the same young man who had spoken to Valentine on the Sunday evening. But this morning he seemed rougher in his speech and manner.

'It's been coming,' he said; 'I've seen it coming.'

'What is it?'

'She's got to rest. Don't tell me, you girls, that she can't. Because she's got to, do you hear? and she's got to have good food.'

'Rest and good food!' said Melenda, bitterly. 'Oh, Lord! why don't you say she's got to have oysters and chicken and port wine?'

'Good food!' said Lizzie. But she looked at Valentine.

'Rest and good food,' the doctor repeated, 'and nothing to do for the remainder of her days; and that won't be long,' he added in a lower tone.

'She shall have rest and proper food,' said Valentine.

The sharpest sting of poverty is when you are made to feel your own impotence to relieve the suffering which wealth can remove; even to avert the death which wealth can stave off. Melenda's eyes flashed, and she made as if she would say something fierce and resentful; but she restrained herself in the presence of the doctor, though the effort cost her a good deal and the tears sprang to her eyes. 'Come, Liz,' she said, 'we'll go back to work.'

'There's only you and me now,' she said presently, looking up; 'Lotty won't come back any more. She won't let her come back. She'll give her grapes and beef and cocoa so that she won't want to come back. She's given her a new petticoat and new stockings already. She'll try to make her hate us just to spite me because I let her have a bit of my mind. Oh, I know for all her meek ways she's a sly one! If it's good for Lotty'—here she choked. She wished to be loyal to her friend, but it was a bitter thing that she should be taking gifts from anybody but herself. 'You'll go next, I suppose, Liz. Very well then. There'll be only me left. If you want to desert me, take and go and do it. Perhaps she'll give you all your meals if you stoop so low as to take 'em.'

'Don't talk wild, Melenda. Lotty hasn't deserted us. Why can't you be civil to your own sister? Why shouldn't she help Lotty? I'm glad she came here—there! I'm glad she came. Do you hear that?'

Melenda at other times would have crushed this spirit of revolt, but she was this morning too dejected, and made no reply.

'Desert us?' Lizzie went on. 'Why shouldn't Lotty desert us, come to that What can we give her? Desert us? Why, Melenda, it's so miserable that we may just as well desert each other at once, and give up trying.'

Still Melenda made no reply.

'Last night,' Lizzie continued, 'she went and sat with father. Poor old dad! With him in his rags. Did you ever do that? And she sang to him, and Saturday all day long she worked for Lotty. You never did more. Desert us? What could Lotty do better, I should like to know? Look at this bed and the one she is lying on; look at this room and the other; look at her dinner and ours. I re'lly wonder you should talk such nonsense.'

Still Melenda made no reply. She was crushed. Her growing discontent and her newly-born knowledge of better things gave Lizzie a spirit which privation could never give her.

In this way, however, Lotty's chains were taken from her.

Day followed day, but she did not rise from the bed. Sometimes Melenda sat beside her,

work in hand, gentle with her, though full of resentment against Valentine. Sometimes Lizzie sat with her. Generally it was Valentine who read to her, sang to her, talked to her, and nursed her. There are some women whose mere presence soothes a patient; whose touch drives away pain; whose voice is a sedative; who are the born nurses. Valentine belonged to them.

A little happiness, even if you do have a bad cough with it, and an aching back, and limbs which feel as if they could never move again, is a medicine delightful to take, and sovereign against many evils, especially lines in the forehead, drawn mouth, and worn eyes. Lotty's thin cheeks did not grow any fuller, but they lost something of their waxen pallor, and a faint glow appeared on them as of winter sunshine. Her hollow chest did not grow any deeper, but her shoulders seemed less contracted. Her eyes were not so weary, and on her thin lips there presently appeared once more the old smile which she had lost about the time when her father went bankrupt, and her mother went mad, and her sister said she wouldn't stand it any longer. She would never

get any better; she knew this somehow, but it is not hard, when one has had so long a spell of work, just to lie passive, though the days which slip by so quickly bring death so very near. Less hard still is it when one has such a nurse as Valentine, and a doctor, who comes every day with something to charm away the aching, and for the first time, after many a long year, dainty and sufficient food. Presently sweet and pleasant thoughts began to linger in her brain; they were thoughts that came to her while Valentine read and sang. The spectre of Famine, with her dreadful uplifted scourge of scorpions, had vanished. She was no longer driven to try, if only for half an hour, to hold the shirts and make the button-holes. She was no longer anxious for the future; though there was no more work for her to do, she should not starve. Valentine was with her; she could close her eyes in peace and sleep without dreaming of an empty shelf in the morning. Is it possible for us, the overfed sons and daughters of a luxurious *bourgeoisie*, our eyes swelling out for fatness, who have never know a single day without its three abundant meals, and never felt the pangs

of unsatisfied appetite, even to conceive of an existence such as Melenda and Lotty had lived together for eight years, with never enough to eat on any day from year to year? Why, one asks, what contentment, what resignation, even what acquiescence in life as a gift or a loan, of something precious, can there be when one is always hungry? Of the two other girls, the presence of Valentine made one daily more discontented with her lot because of that terrible temptation of which we have heard. She could any day, only by saying the word, convert herself, she was told, from a work-girl into a 'lady'—the word being used to signify one who does no work for her living, and wears fine clothes and lives in comfort. As for the other, it made her daily more obdurate and more angry, because she was so helpless, and it was Valentine who did everything for her friend.

'I won't be kind to her, then,' she said, when for the fiftieth time Lotty besought her and expostulated with her. 'I won't give in and be kind to her. Why should I? First, she comes and laughs at us.'

'No, she didn't laugh.'

'She said she was twins and she didn't

know which she was. Do you call that laughing at us? I do. Then she comes again and thinks she can make it up with beefsteak and ham. No, Lotty; and it ain't likely.'

'She came to live here of her own accord. She wasn't obliged to come. She's never cross and never unkind; she never says a hard word of anybody; and oh, Melenda, the care she takes of me! Even you, my dear, never took more care. And the nights when she sits up with me, and the things she gets for me, and, oh, Melenda, I ain't her sister, and she'd do more than this for you if you'd only let her.' Melenda sniffed. That fact made Valentine's conduct the more intrusive. 'And she watches every day for you to give in a bit.'

'Let her watch, then,' said Melenda.

'No little pocket Gospel after all?' asked the Doctor again. He was standing at the foot of the bed looking at his patient. He had not removed his hat—a ceremony he usually omitted in his rounds—his hands were in his pockets, and his shoulders were a little rounded, and he looked as if he despised the vulgar

details of good manners. 'No little pocket Gospel, then?'

'None—why?'

'Because—well—because, the summer is hot and this place is noisome, and you are doing the work of a hospital nurse, and somehow you look as if you ought to be at the seaside, or in some quiet country place under the trees. And, in short, what do you do it for?'

'Why do you ask for motives? You said yourself the other day that there was only one motive, and that was pure selfishness.'

'That is so. They call it religion, patriotism, benevolence, charity—whatever they please. It is all self-preservation.'

'And there is no disinterested action at all possible for poor humanity?'

'There are illusions. Women do wonderful things for men whom they love, as they call it. Men call it love when they subjugate a woman and get a slave for nothing. Why women delight in being slaves I do not know.'

'And so everything is an illusion.'

'Everything except what you see; and sometimes that is an illusion too. When life is

over, what is the past but illusion? We are born: we live and suffer: and we die: and are forgotten. That is the history of Ivy Lane, where there are eight hundred people, and two births and one funeral every week. But I don't understand you. If we ever do get a lady here, she comes and looks about her, and is disappointed because we are not more unpleasant, and then she does a kind thing or two and goes away with a feeling that the sum of poverty has been sensibly alleviated by her visit. She has seen a suffering object, which gave her pain; she has relieved her suffering for a little while, which gave her pleasure. But you—why, you have given—Yourself. Well'—he changed the subject abruptly—'what do you think of the working girl? You have got three of them to study. There are thousands just exactly like them.'

'I can think of these three only and how to help them.'

He answered indirectly. He took up Lotty's arm and bared it to the elbow.

'You see: a strong bone and a good length of limb. Nature designed this arm for a stout strong woman. A fair breadth of

shoulder, too. Nature meant this girl to be a really fine specimen. Look at her forehead: it is broad and low—a capable forehead; and her mouth—see how fine are the lines and yet how strong; this was meant to be a very noble woman, strong in her illusions of love for husband and children. Yet, you see, a splendid model ruined.'

'Poor Lotty!'

'We are always wasting and ruining fine models. This street is full of human wrecks. You've got two of them below—Mr. Lane, the letter-writer, and the old woman. What does it mean?'

'Can you tell me what it means?'

'Nature says to man, "Learn my secrets, or I will kill you. I have no pity on anyone—I will kill you unless you learn my secrets." Very well: some of us, the happy few who can, are always learning these secrets, and saving men from Nature's traps. But man says to his brother, "If you are not strong enough to defend yourself against me, I will make you my slave; you shall work for me on my own terms." I don't know whether Nature is more cruel than man, or man than Nature.

Here you see'—he touched Lotty's cheek. The girl did not understand a word of what he was saying, but he was the Doctor, and if he were to cut off her arms she would not dream of resistance. 'Here is a case in which man, meeting no power of self-defence, has worked his wicked will, pretending that he is obeying the laws of political economy. That is to say, he turns this girl into a machine for doing what she ought not to have done at all, for longer hours than she ought to work, for less pay than she ought to receive, and for poorer food than any woman ought to eat. Nature, at her worst, would not have trampled on her worse than man has done.'

'What are we to do then?'

He sat down and looked in her face blankly.

'I don't know. If I did know everybody else should know. There are only two ways of helping the working women, and one of these, at least, is possible. The impossible way is that the ladies of the country shall unite to form a Protection League for their working sisters.'

'Why is that impossible?'

'Because they don't care for their working sisters,' he replied, bluntly. 'You only care because you have lived among them and know what their sufferings are. Ladies deliberately shut their eyes; they won't take trouble; they won't think; they like things about them to look smooth and comfortable; they will get things cheap if they can. What do they care if the cheapness is got by starving women? What is killing this girl here? Bad food and hard work. Cheapness! What do the ladies care how many working girls are killed? Confess now.'

Valentine would not confess.

'Well, there may be another way. It is by the working people themselves, and that by a grand universal League, or Federation, or Brotherhood of Labour—men and women alike—to control wages and work. I do not see why such a League should not be formed. If men can unite for one branch of work they ought to be able to unite for all.'

'Why should they not?'

'Because the mass that has to be moved is so gigantic that not one prophet but ten thousand all preaching the same gospel at the

same time are wanted. I wonder how it would work out.'

'How would it work out?'

'We've always got to take into consideration man's greed and selfishness. However, if we got over that, first of all, a case like this would not be allowed. The League would make it impossible. The League——' he sat down and put his hands in his pockets, looking straight into Valentine's face, but as if he did not see her. 'I have often wondered what such a League would do. I suppose it would become a most stupendous tyranny—everything for the general good must be. I think it would try to be just on the whole—there's somehow a natural instinct against injustice; it would be the most powerful instrument ever devised; it would control the whole Government; it would go making all kinds of laws for the restriction of liberty, that is quite certain. I suppose they wouldn't let the men marry under thirty nor the women under five-and-twenty. As for the men with land and capital, and Corporate Bodies and Companies with property, I should say the League would make itself unpopular with them. One thing, however, the League

would do, and that as soon as it was established.'

'What is that?'

'It would insist on this girl and her friends working half the time for double the wages.'

'I don't see much difference,' said Valentine, 'between your League and Sam's Socialism.'

'I haven't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Samuel, but there is this difference—that my League will be formed by the people for the people, and the Socialists want to impose their scheme on the people.'

'Why not, if it is good for them?'

'Because, young lady, you can't improve people by any scheme or law or government at all. They must improve themselves. The best chance is when every man feels that he is part of the Government. You have no idea of their obstinacy. They will neither be led nor driven nor coaxed; they will only go of their own free will. And some ways they will never go at all.'

'Then I wish the Brotherhood or League were formed already.'

'Perhaps you and your friends would lose your property and your money.'

'But we should free Melenda.'

'A very good thing for her, and I don't suppose it would be very bad for you. As for me, I have got no money, and my profession brings in as it is only the wages of a mechanic —so I shall not suffer.'

He got up and buttoned his coat.

'You, Lotty girl,' he said, 'keep quiet. I sometimes think'—he turned to Valentine again as he went out—'I sometimes think that I may live to see that great League of Labour.'

I know not what Lotty heard or understood of the Doctor's discourse, but it may have been this which suggested a truly wonderful dream that came to her that very afternoon when she fell asleep after dinner while Valentine sat reading, and through the open window came the murmur of the children's voices in the school behind Ivy Lane. According to an ancient authority there are five kinds of dreams; and sometimes they come through the gate of horn and sometimes through that of ivory. This dream came to Lotty through the gate of ivory. It was the kind described as the imagination of a non-existent thing, and yet a

holy dream, and one to be received as a gift from heaven and sent to cheer and comfort a dying girl with the vision of what might be. She dreamed that she was in a workshop—lofty, well aired, and beautiful. She was doing some kind of work—I think she was making up white linen robes for the harpers who play before the Throne—and her work filled her with joy. She was quite well and strong, and without pain of any kind, and she felt a strange elasticity in her limbs. Her sister Tilly was beside her dressed in white like herself, and as she recognised her it was as if a sponge had blotted out the past, so that it should be remembered no more, and Lotty rejoiced that Tilly too should have a frock as white as any in the work-room.

Melenda was with her too, the lines gone from her face, her thin cheeks filled out, looking truly beautiful in the eyes of Lotty and her like; and Lizzie was there, also with work in her hand, but laughing and talking more than she worked. Valentine was there too, dressed just the same as herself, but she looked more lovely than all the rest; and the other one—she who had cried when Melenda spoke up; but now she was sitting beside Melenda with one arm

round her neck. They were all so fond of Melenda that they could not make enough of her. There were thousands of work-girls in the room; they were all laughing and talking happily; and outside the open window stretched a great garden with the morning sun lying on it, and orchards filled with trees loaded with ripe apples. The scent of flowers came into the room; and no one was tired, no one was hungry, no one was cross or wicked. Strangest thing of all, Lizzie's father was with them, looking venerable with his long white hair brushed off his forehead. He was not in rags, but dressed like a gentleman, and he sat at a great organ. When he began to play, Valentine stood up to sing, and all the girls tried to sing too, but could not, because of the tears—tears of joy and happiness—and the memories of the cruel past, which choked them.

'Why, Lotty, Lotty!' said Valentine, 'what is the matter, dear?'

'It was my dream,' she replied, looking about her.

'You laughed and cried together, dear. But you have had a long and refreshing sleep, and it is nearly tea time. This makes up for last night, doesn't it?'

CHAPTER IX.

SHOWING HOW THE BAND PLAYED.

'MELENDA says Sam's here,' said Lizzie, putting her head into the room. 'If you want to see him, you'd better come at once. And, I say, you'd better look out. Melenda's in a rage, and the band's a-going to play, sharp!'

Sam Monument, from time to time, remembered that he had a sister, and went to visit her. It was not often; because since his rise to greatness, he was no longer proud of his poor relations. The few among us who have raised themselves to the level of a Board School master will sympathise with Sam. Besides, it made him ashamed even to think of Melenda; and it made him rage like Scylla and Charybdis, and the Maelström, and the rapids of Niagara, actually to see her at her miserable work. Again, there is a rule which should be carefully observed in visiting one's poor relations; but

Sam had never heard of this rule; namely, always to visit them in mild and cloudy weather. The former, that one may be spared the bitterness of cold; and the latter, so that there may be no mockery of sunshine. Sam came to Ivy Lane on a splendid summer evening, when the sunshine made everything glorious that was clean and neat, and magnified the meanness of everything that was dingy and ill-kept. When Valentine opened the door he was standing with his back to the empty fireplace, which gave him the command, so to speak, of the room. Melenda was sitting by the table, her work in her lap, and the thimble on her finger; but she was not sewing; and there was a gleam in her eye which betokened another approaching Triumph of Temper. She looked strangely like her brother; the eyes as bright, the lips as firm, only that her own red hair was long and Sam's was short, rising from his forehead like a cliff, so that his head resembled the rounded back of a hedgehog about to defend its property.

'Oh!' he said, with a kind of snort when Valentine appeared. 'You *are* here, then. Claude told me something about it. I hope you are pleased with what you have found.

Ever been in this room before? Have you looked round it? Satisfied and pleased with it? Like to feel that your sister lives in it? Nice place, isn't it?' He went on without waiting for an answer. 'Nice work, too, they do in it. Wholesome, well-paid work. Work to make a woman rich and happy. Something for your rich friends to be proud of, isn't it?'

The room looked more than commonly dingy. The strings of the blind were broken; the blind itself was pinned up, and a reflection of the evening sun from an opposite window fell upon the side of the room, not so much lighting it up as showing how dingy it was, and how desperately shabby.

'It don't matter much what you think, Sam, nor what she thinks. Thinking can't alter things. Those who've got work to do must do the work they can get. She can give dinners to people who haven't the independence to refuse'—Melenda tossed her head at Lizzie, who laughed defiance—'and will only be the more discontented afterwards, when she goes away. But she can't get us better work nor better wages. What's the good then?'

'What did you come for?' Sam asked.

'What made you leave your friends and come down here? These people are your enemies: the working people are the natural enemies of the people who do nothing. I told you, when I saw you first, that you've got to choose. If you like to give them up, say the word, and I'll find something for you to do. If you won't give them up, then go away back again, and enjoy yourself as long as you can, till the smash comes.'

'I shall not give them up, certainly,' said Valentine. 'And I am not going back again just yet.'

'Oh, very well. You're one of those who go tinkering up a rotten place here and painting over a bad place there, and pretending that everything is sound and healthy. I know the sort. You get some people together, and you give a concert, and call it softening the masses. You get a few pictures and hang 'em up in a schoolroom and call it introducing Art among the Lower Orders. Yah! Art and the Lower Orders! Or you have tea and cakes and a hymn, and call it bringing religion home to the people. And then you go around with pennies and oranges for the children and

flannel for the old women, and call it bringing the classes together. As long as you choose to stay with them, I tell you all the people are your natural enemies. Melenda here is your enemy, and so is Lizzie, and so is the girl you've got laid up in the other room.'

There is a pleasing nursery fiction that accounts for many disagreeable things by a theory on the right and the wrong way of getting out of bed. Valentine remembered this and felt quite certain that Sam, Melenda, and Lizzie had all three got out of bed the wrong way that morning. There was going to be a Row, and one of uncertain dimensions. And she was invited by Melenda in order that she might assist at that Row and help to make it a Row Royal. Therefore, she made haste with a soft answer.

'I did not come with any ambitious idea of spreading Art or Religion. I simply came because I wanted to know—my sister—Melenda.' This was not a fib absolute, because when she came Melenda was a possible sister. But it was so far a fib that Valentine hesitated a little over its utterance.

'Ho!' said Melenda, just to show how

very little way in knowledge Valentine had so far advanced.

'Partly I wanted to see with my own eyes the kind of life from which I—that is, Melenda's sister, Polly—had been taken.'

'Yes,' said Melenda; 'to look at us as if we were black savages in a show, and to give us half a sovereign each, and then go away and forget us.'

'Melenda is unjust,' Valentine replied; 'but she tolerates my presence, which is something, though she will not accept any service from me.'

'How long are you going to stay? You can't be comfortable here?' Sam asked.

'I didn't ask her to come, and I shan't ask her to stay,' said Melenda the Irreconcilable, now in her most stubborn mood, her upper lip stiffened and her eye set stormy. Perhaps she was stimulated by the example of her brother, who was of mule-like obstinacy. He called it firmness.

'I am to stay here all the summer,' Valentine explained. 'Then I am going back for a time. After that my plans are not yet certain.'

'Humph!' said Sam. 'You've taken a

great deal of trouble for nothing, That's all. As for wanting to know a girl who hasn't got the spirit to raise herself out of this'—he looked round with the infinite contempt of a self-raised man—'I don't see what you expect to get by it. You've only put her back up so far.'

'That's all,' said Melenda; 'and it is going to keep up.'

'There's one thing you might do,' he went on. 'You might help to make the workwomen discontented. Suppose you got hold of Lizzie here!' He laid his hand upon her shoulder. 'Suppose you made her compare her frock with yours, and told her to ask why there is so much difference.' Lizzie lifted her great eyes upon Valentine's frock, which really was a very neat and finished piece of work, and fitted her like a glove. Her own, she knew well, could not be compared with it. Little did Sam know of the seeds of discontent already planted in her bosom. 'But that you don't dare to try. You and your friends are all for keeping them quiet. Make her feel that she hasn't got what she ought to have; then teach her why she hasn't got it—because she's robbed by your friends. Then there'll be a chance that the girls will

combine to get it, and that they'll be backed up by the men. As for these girls, they haven't begun to grumble.'

'Haven't we?' said Melenda.

'They *believe* that there isn't more money to be got.'

'No more there is,' said Melenda.

'They think it is a law of the universe that they should work and live in a room like this, and go in rags, and be paid elevenpence ha'penny a day.'

'And find your own cotton,' said Lizzie, furnishing a not unimportant detail.

'And fourpence for the workbook, which you can get for a penny outside. And if you dare to complain they make it sixpence,' Melenda added.

'And be sworn at if they're Germans, and drilled if they're English. We like it, I suppose.'

'You're a fool, Sam,' said Melenda, putting the case plainly. 'You and your discontent! If you really think we like it, you're a bigger fool than you look. We didn't want her coming here, nor you neither, to teach us that it's a shame.'

'Nor to tell me to look at her frock and mine,' said Lizzie.

'Come then, Sam,' his sister went on while Valentine kept a careful silence, 'come then. Have you got anything better for us when we have got discontented? There's machine work and shirts at a penny apiece; we can get twopence a dozen for the button-holes; there's bottle-washing for five shillings a week, and cigar-makin' for the same; there's the dust yards and the sifting at a shilling a day. Shall we change for that? There's the matchmakers with the stuff that eats away their mouths——'

'Oh, Melenda!' said Valentine.

'What's he come here for, then? How can we find time to keep the place neat and tidy? Why ain't we better off? Let him show us the way, then.'

'It's better,' said Lizzie, 'to help people than it is to get into a rage with them. Valentine does help me and Lotty in spite of Melenda.'

Melenda looked as if she might turn on the other two as well as on her brother. But she refrained. 'If that is all you've got to say, Sam, you may as well go.'

'Coming here,' Lizzie went on, with a laudable desire to assist in the music of the band, 'and swearing at us as if it was our own fault.'

'I didn't swear,' said Sam, in some confusion.

'You did. You always do when you come here.'

'Well, then, it's enough to make a pig swear,' he replied guiltily, because a Board School master certainly ought not to swear. Language and temper are beneath the dignity of a profession which should be above the minor weaknesses of humanity.

'Well, Sam, please do not swear again,' said Valentine, still anxious for peace; 'and now—you who know so much and have had so many opportunities for studying the question from your position—your exceptional and high position, Sam—won't you sit down quietly and give us your advice?'

He did not sit down, but he took the chair from her and placed it before him, his hands on the back so that it made a kind of pulpit.

'All he's got to tell us,' said Melenda, 'is that it's a shame, and we ought to combine and strike.'

'It's the system,' Sam began. 'I am ready to give you the best advice if you'll only follow it. It's the rotten competitive system—you've got to abolish that. As for you girls combining and striking, you won't do it. I told you once to combine, but now I see that women ain't educated up to combination. Combination means common sense—you haven't got it; you haven't the brains nor the courage to do it.'

'We've got our independence, anyhow,' said Melenda.

'And much good that does you. Independence! As if anybody is independent who's got to work for your starvation wages. You're slaves—you're white slaves. That's what you are!'

'And what are you, then, I should like to know? You've got no work to do, I suppose?'

'We cannot alter the system,' said Valentine, again interposing; 'at least, I suppose we cannot alter it without a good deal of trouble and delay. Meantime, don't you think you could devise something temporary for Melenda and Lizzie until you have swept away competition?'

'Who wants his help?' asked Melenda.

'I tell you he can only say it's a shame. That's all he ever does say.'

'I can't help them,' said Sam; 'nobody can help them in that way. I tell you again that it's the fault of the system. There are women by thousands no better off. If you can make your ladies leave off trying to get things cheap; if you can make your masters contented with a workman's wage for profit; if you can make the men resolve that the women shall be properly paid, and that they must strike for them and forbid them to take less; well—if you can make everybody think of his neighbour first—then you may let your system alone, because it won't matter. You can't do that, and so you must destroy the system.'

'Then there seems a very poor chance for the present generation of shirt-makers. But what are you going to put in its place? And how do you know that it will be better than the present plan?'

Sam smiled with pity; girls brought up like Valentine were indeed ignorant.

'You know nothing,' he replied; 'I have told you already some of our scheme, but I

suppose Claude laughed at it and told you to forget it at once.'

'Tell me again, then, if you please.'

'Very well. Now listen. We shall destroy the competitive system. What does that mean? Why, that there will be no masters first, no capitalists, no landowners, no property of any kind.'

'Oh! then who will pay the workmen?'

'Listen, and don't interrupt. The State will be the only employer of labour. There will be no rich people. If you have a mountain of gold it will not buy you an hour of luxury, nor will it save you an hour of labour. The stores will be kept by the State, and the food distributed daily. All will work alike and all will live alike. There will be only one rate of wages, and men and women alike will be paid, not in money, but by abundance of everything that is necessary and pleasant to life; no man will be at the beck and call of another. Think of that! Oh, we are on the eve of the most glorious revolution!' He swung his arms, and his eyes glowed. 'There will dawn before long the most glorious day. Why, there will be no crime then, because every man will have

all he wants, so that there will be no temptation to steal and rob; and every man will be happy, so that there will be no temptation to violence; and every girl contented and well fed, so that every girl shall keep her self-respect. There will be one offence, and only one against the State—the crime of laziness, which will be punished by bread-and-water diet. There will be one education for all; the government shall be by the people for the people; there will be no rich class, no better class, no priests, no lazy class; everybody for a certain time every day will work at something productive—but production will be regulated by committees; for the rest of the time a man will do as he pleases. Some will become artists, some will study, some, I suppose, will be preachers, some scientific men, some actors, some will write books, some will play music—the only professional men who will not be required to work at production will be doctors of medicine and schoolmasters. These, of course, will be chosen from the cleverest of the boys. The courts of justice will be administered by juries who will sit every day all the year round, every man taking his turn; law shall be open to everybody and will

be free, but there will not be much left to dispute about when all property is held in trust for everybody. All the things that are now luxuries—the rare fruits and the costly wines—will be distributed to the sick and the old. Books, pictures, music, and plays will be produced for nothing at all after working hours. Every man will be taught that he must be watchful of his own rights and jealous for the community. Every man will take his turn to be a policeman. There will be no other distinctions among men than those which nature has created: for some will be strong and some weak, some will be quick and some slow. But there will be no titles, no aristocracy, no class, and no pride of one man over another. Think of it! No more poverty—no more disease from luxury or from privation, no more ignorance, no more indolence, no more vice! Think of it, I say, if ever you think of anything.'

He paused, not because he was exhausted, but because he wanted, naturally, to observe the effect of his oration.

Melenda pretended that she was not listening. But she was. She listened against her will; she could not tell that the thing was as yet

only a dream, and could never be realised in her own time. Sam's words filled her soul with vague hopes and a warm glow; and he looked so grand while he spoke that she was proud of him, and forgave him for his impatience and contempt. Lizzie for her part was wholly unmoved. She thought of nothing but of Sam's advice to be discontented and to compare Valentine's frock with her own. It was right, then, to be angry and to ask why she must live on slops and go in rags, and Valentine lived like a lady.

As for Valentine, it seemed to her as if in this squalid room the words had altogether a new force and meaning. In Claude's chambers she had only half perceived their significance, but here—in the presence of the two girls—they fell upon her ears like the first preaching of a new gospel. What sacrifice would be too great to bring about the state of things pictured by this young apostle? Surely there has never been since the world began any dream more generous and more noble than this of the Socialist, insomuch that there are some who think that it was first revealed to the world by the Son of God Himself. It is so

beautiful that it will never be suffered to be forgotten, so beautiful that mankind will henceforth be continually occupied in trying to make it a practical reality; and with every successive failure, will always be drawing nearer and nearer to the goal, until at last, if the kind gods consent, even after many years and many generations, it shall be won, and with it the Kingdom long talked of and little understood. But those who expect it in this their lifetime might as well expect the Kingdom of Heaven.

'Thank you, Sam,' said Valentine, bringing herself back to the present with an effort. 'But this is a scheme for the far future.'

'No, it is for the present. Not to-day perhaps, nor to-morrow, but before your hair is grey it will be realised over the whole world.'

'Meantime what are Melenda and Lizzie to do?'

'We've got to go on working,' said the latter.

'What will you do meantime for your sister, Sam?'

'Melenda may—she may——' he made an heroic effort, 'well, she may come and live with me if she'll behave.'

'I shan't then, there! I won't live with

anybody, and I won't behave, and I'll go in and out just as I please.'

'Can you not find any better way of life for them?' Valentine persisted.

'No, I can't. There isn't any better work for girls who can only sew. You must alter the system. The work and the wages are getting worse instead of better. The worse they get, the more injustice there is, the sooner will be the end. You must begin with the beginning, I tell you. Destroy Capital and abolish Property. But what do you care for the people?'

'I care for this room at least and the people in it. Come, Sam, give me credit for a little humanity. I care for those of the people whom I know. Isn't that enough for a beginning? How if we were all to do as much? Perhaps there would be no need to alter the System.'

'You talk like a woman. Well, then'—he picked up his hat, which he had flung on the floor at the earlier stage of the discussion—'I've made my offer. If Melenda likes to accept it, she can. If not, she will please herself. I'm going. Good-night, Melenda.'

'Will you let me walk with you a little way?' Valentine asked.

'Just as you like.' It seems an ungracious way of putting it, but what he meant was simple consent.

They walked down Hoxton Street, across Old Street, and along the Curtain Road, where the furniture places were closed, and the street quiet, and the German journeymen were out of sight in some hidden dens, smoking pipes, and dreaming like Sam of a New World.

'You belong to the other side,' he said after a while. 'That is very certain. Yet I should like to talk to you; but there—it is no use, I suppose. You've been brought up in their way, and because it's an easy life you think it is beautiful.'

'I only know of one side.'

'That's rubbish. In all history there's always two sides: there's the tyrant and there's the slave: there's the oppressor and there's the oppressed: there's the rich and there's the poor: there's the workman and there's the master. The Lord didn't make simple man, you see, He made two classes. There were two Adams. That's what they want us to

believe. The land belongs to one of them, and the duty of tilling it for nothing to the other. Oh, yes, I know the talk. There's two classes when we are quiet; there's only one class when it comes to keeping them contented. Wait till we get our turn.'

'In your scheme, Sam, no one is to be lazy, no one is to shirk work, and the best men in the country will think it their highest privilege to work for all. I understand you to mean this. Yes. It is very beautiful. But how are you going to teach and to discipline the people and keep them up to the mark?'

'Oh!' Sam replied superior. 'Why, the very question shows your ignorance. You don't understand the first elements of our party. Don't you see that there will be no necessity for teaching at all—that the very establishment of justice for the first time in the history of the world—free and equal justice, with no favours to any, will create such a grand universal jealousy that all injustice of every kind will be made impossible? There never has been any justice hitherto. There have been laws and lawyers, and decisions of courts have been sold to the highest bidders. But there has

been no justice. It will be such a beautiful thing that everybody will watch everybody else and himself as well, to see that there is no shirking of duty, There will be an irresistible determination—but of course you cannot understand the force of the Will of the People?'

'Well,' said Valentine, to whom the talk about the irresistible Will of the People was a new thing—and indeed it is strange that while cultivated and educated men have never agreed together to have a Will of their own and to pronounce it, we are constantly told that the rough and ignorant are thinking as one man, and acting together with one consent and in such beautiful unanimity—'well, then, the Will of the People, I suppose, will order everybody to be equally good, and the order will be obeyed without any difficulty. Why, it will be a return to the Promised Land—No, it will be nothing short of a return to the Garden of Eden. And, Sam, just think what a discovery you have made! The flaming sword which turns every way in the hands of the cherubim is nothing else than the Competitive System.'

'As you like,' Sam replied a little sulkily. There was just a faint hint of ridicule in

Valentine's words. No Prophet can abide ridicule. 'I don't care what you call it. Call it what you please. Only don't pretend that you misunderstand the meaning.'

'Sam, you are so strong and brave,' Valentine laid her hand upon his arm, 'you are so clever, you know so much, that I am sure you can help us if you think it over. Never mind the Competitive System: that will take a good many years to destroy, I am sure, and perhaps it will outlast our time. Try to find some readier way to help those girls. Consider, one of them is dying slowly; we can't save her; we can only make her easier: the other two are wasting their lives in the most terrible poverty. I could give them money, but indeed it is not alms they want. Melenda will not have it. Won't you try to help them? Think, Sam, oh, think'—she laid her hand upon his arm—'of their rags and their misery and try to help them.'

'I do think of their rags. Good God! Valentine, or Polly, or whatever they call you, I think of their rags and their misery for weeks together after I have seen Melenda.'

'Then I wish, Sam, that you saw her every day.'

'If I did I should only hate the system more and more. That other girl—she'll die, I suppose.'

'Yes, she must die. Melenda is stronger. The one who will go next is Lizzie, unless something can be done.'

'There's only one thing that can be done —destroy the Competitive System. Abolish property. Sweep away Capital, Lands, and Church, and Masters. Give Socialism a fair start.'

Nothing more could be got out of him. A mathematician, we know, tries his theory on elementary cases; Socialism, and the ladies and gentlemen who construct, with infinite labour, constitutions, schemes, and plans for the universal good, do not. The simple case is beyond them. They are full of rage against the old system, but their indignation is expended in deepening their political convictions.

There was once another man who went down the Jericho road and fell among thieves. First there passed by the priest, just as in the former case, his scornful chin in the air: and then the Levite followed. Now this Levite did not immediately pass by, but he stopped and

inquired carefully into the particulars of the case and made full notes of them, and then he went his way, and out of the notes he compiled a most tremendous oration, eloquent, fiery, and convincing, which he delivered at a meeting of the Democratic Federal Union, on the wretched system under which robbers are suffered to exist, and propounded another System by means of which there would be no more robbers in the land at all. And yet the old System goes on still, and still we see coming along the hot and thirsty road the Samaritan with his nimble twopence.

'Good-night, Sam,' Valentine said coldly; 'I ask you for advice, and you offer me the chance of a new System. Go away and rail at Competition, while we look after its victims.'

CHAPTER X.

THE REVEREND RANDAL SMITH.

The Assistant Priest of St. Agatha's—this was the church where the morning congregation did not contain a single man—was at this time—he has just been promoted to the more independent sphere of a mission church—the Rev. Randal Smith. It was he who ran up the stairs when Valentine was singing in order to discover the secret of this strange thing.

This young gentleman became, by a gradual and natural development of events, one of Valentine's friends. Their friendship, it is true, was based upon what the Doctor maintained to be the true basis of all friendship—self-interest. He first introduced himself to her in the street—there was no other common place of meeting—stopping before her and half lifting his hat. It was one of those sweet things in felt with a very broad flat brim and strings and a tassel,

and he took it off with the doubtful courtesy which certain Englishmen yield to the Uncertain Person, as if it were a disgrace to lift the hat to any under a recognised social position. This prejudice will vanish when the Board Schools condescend to teach manners, and the working man has learned to lift his hat to the working woman.

'I beg your pardon——'

He affected the quick breathless manner adopted by many young clergymen and by some young masters in public schools. It is a manner which may mean anything, like an algebraical symbol—perhaps that is the reason why it has been adopted—but it is really understood to be a 'note,' or outward and visible sign, of earnestness coupled with intellectual superiority. At Toynbee Hall, very oddly, it is not recognised, which makes one suspect the sincerity and the superiority of that institution.

'I beg your pardon. I think I heard you singing the other evening in Ivy Lane.'

'It is very likely.'

'I—I—have also learnt'—it was difficult to

believe—'that you are the—the—sister of one of the girls who live there.'

'It is possible.'

He was quite a young man, not more than five or six and twenty, slight and small in stature, shaven of cheek and chin, pale-faced, insignificant of aspect. As to his creed, he professed to belong to the small and narrow sect called Ritualists, and this was proclaimed to the general world by the brim of his hat which was so broad, and the length of his skirts. By these symbols he professed the most decided views as to his own authority, and the tremendous powers which he held by virtue of his office; though he was really a most simple creature, who would have been crushed, had he at all understood or realised the nature of his own pretensions, by the mere weight of them; he had never distinguished himself in any way either at school or college; he had read next to nothing, and knew next to nothing, of history, literature, or theology; his creed was narrow, bigoted, unhistorical, and intolerant; his manner was fussy, underbred, and full of little affectations. With his priestly pretensions, and his ignorance, and his fussiness, he was

just exactly the kind of figure that scoffers like to put up in a pillory and pelt with epigrams, new and old, derisive laughter, mocking questions, and sneers and jeers. He was also exactly the kind of man who would not alter his course for any amount of epigrams, whether they cut like flints or whether they broke in his face like rotten eggs; and, when they took him down from his pillory, he would have gone away wondering that the world could be so sinful as actually to scoff and sniff at the sacerdotal office.

In other respects this assistant priest belonged to a kind of mortal which has never been extinct or unknown amongst us, and of late seems to have become common. It is not the cleverest kind, nor is it the most learned, the most critical, the most logical, or the most capable of argument. But it is a kind which has one great distinctive quality: it has perceived very plainly that there is a kind of life, possible to all who choose to follow it, which is an imitation, however humble, of a certain great Exemplar. In fact, no Hermit, no Solitary, no Friar of orders grey, black,

white, blue, green, yellow, buff, indigo, magenta, mauve, or alezan, ever more diligently followed that Exemplar than do the men of this kind. At the age of twenty-three, that is to say, as early as it is permitted to them, they absolutely renounce for ever the world and all its delights ; they give up society, culture, learning, art, and pleasures of every kind ; they plunge head foremost into a vast ocean, mirky and cloudy, whose waves have no brightness and whose waters know no smiles ; they become, in fact, assistant priest or curate, whichever they prefer to be called, in a parish of poverty ; they are the slaves, all day long, of the people ; they cease to have any individual life ; they have no longer any pursuits.

It is a comparatively unimportant detail in such a life, that the man has a church where he must perform certain duties. Yet these take time ; he has to read prayers, or to sing matins and evensong, if he prefers that way of describing the Function ; he marries and baptises ; he has once a week to provide a discourse always full of new thoughts, powerful logic, and words which burn—at least, these things are expected. It does not really matter in the least what he

preaches in places like Hoxton, because no one ever goes to church. Generally, he preaches a set of doctrines which the British working man is just as likely to embrace as he is to abandon the franchise, or to dissolve his trade unions, or to give up his beer, or to join goody clubs. But his real work is outside his church. He is the almoner of the parish ; he is always administering charitable funds, finding out deserving cases, and dividing eighteenpence equally among thirteen poor people ; he is a professor of the conduct of life ; because weaker brethren get drunk he has to wear a nasty little blue ribbon, and may not look upon the amber and the froth of the cheerful pewter ; because there are so many to be helped, and so little to help them with, he lives with the greatest frugality, and gives away all that he can spare, being paid for the most part in the coin of ingratitude ; he has got schools to visit ; of late years he has been expected—who has neither Art nor culture—to become the Prophet of culture and the Fosterer of Art ; and now, on top of all these duties, he has had imposed upon him the care of providing and devising amusement, holidays, excursions, concerts, clubs, and insti-

tutes for the young and old. He works all day long and regrets that there are not more than sixteen hours available; he is always cheerful. And for the sake of what he does and the life he leads, let us by no means laugh at this young man, but suffer him without sneers or epigrams to believe what it pleases his unhistorical soul to think he believes, so long as he does not try to make us acknowledge that he carries about in his own little waistcoat pocket, on the same bunch as his latch-key, the keys of the Gates of Heaven.

'I—I—I heard you sing,' he repeated. 'And I was much pleased. For an untrained voice—'

'Quite so,' said Valentine gravely. But there was in her eyes a light for which there is no prettier word, I regret to say, than the word 'twinkle.' Nothing is more delightful than the sudden awakening to a sense of the humorous situation shown by the twinkle of a girl's bright eyes.

'But perhaps you have been trained. I beg your pardon.'

'Pray go on.'

'I have an Institute of working boys. It

occurred to me that perhaps—perhaps—would you sing to them?'

'I do not know. Will you show me your Institute?'

He led her into one of the streets which branch off right and left, and stopped at a corner house.

'This is the place,' he said. 'We get the working lads here, and teach them and amuse them in the evening.'

The door opened, without the intervention of hall or passage, into a good-sized room of irregular shape, fitted with benches and one or two narrow tables; at one end was a great fireplace with texts displayed above it, and at the other end was a low platform with a piano. On the walls at the end were a few shelves which formed the boys' library.

'Upstairs,' said the young clergyman, his eyes kindling as he showed his beloved Institute, 'there are class-rooms and a bagatelle board, where the older lads may smoke if they like; outside in the yard is a gymnasium. This is our common sitting and reading room where we sometimes try singing. Unfortunately I was never taught to sing or play. I

can intone of course, but I cannot sing, and as for accompaniment I am trying to learn a few simple chords. Perhaps I could help out with something for you.'

'Let me hear you,' said Valentine.

His knowledge of the art was limited and his simple chords were few. He confessed that he rose every morning at six in order to acquire some mastery over the instrument, but as yet with small success.

'What do you do with your boys?' she asked him.

It appeared on explanation that his evenings were wholly devoted to the care of those boys, with whom he worked, read, taught, and played. While he spoke of them his face lit up, he forgot the little mannerism of speech and became natural. This was the work that he loved.

Valentine felt that she stood on the threshold of a new kind of life. She went on to question him. He had other work, and a great deal of it, of a much less interesting kind. He ought to have had nothing to do but to look after the boys, whose minds he was filling with thoughts which would lead

some of them whither he could not guess. But he had, besides, the church services every day, sick people to visit, poor people to relieve, a mission chapel to serve in some slum or other, addresses to prepare—an endless round of work, with no rest for a single day in the week and no hope that it would ever grow lighter.

'It is a hard life,' said Valentine, wondering at the courage of those who embrace such a life.

'It is my Work,' he replied, lapsing into breathlessness and folding his hands, after the unreal manner of his kind. Why will they fold their hands?

Valentine thought that he belonged to those heroes who are best left unseen. There are many such, and when they die their lives read most beautifully.

She sat down and suffered her fingers to ramble over the keys, thinking of this man and his life. Presently she looked up. 'I will sing for your boys whenever you please.'

'Thank you.'

'Do you know all the people in your parish? Do you know the working women?'

'I try to know them all,' he replied, breathlessly. 'It is my duty to know them all. The parish clergy are in charge of them.'

'Do you ever think of them? Can you tell me how anything can be done for them?'

'If they would come to church, and submit to discipline.'

'I do not speak of their religion, but of their material welfare. Can anything be done to get them better wages and easier work?'

'I do not know. It is not the duty of a parish priest to consider the subject of work.'

'You are among these poor working women all day long, and yet you have never considered the subject? Surely it must force itself upon you.'

'What would be the use? I can do nothing. I suppose there must always be poverty—"The poor ye have always with you."'

'Oh!' Valentine cried, impatiently. 'Nobody ever tries to help. I have asked a schoolmaster, and a doctor, and a scholar, and now I have asked a clergyman; and there is no help in any of them. Does nobody in the world care what becomes of the working women?'

'The Church cares for all alike,' he replied, still breathless and superior.

She bade him good morning and left him. There was then no help to be got from man, not even from those who go continually among the people and see their suffering and the patience of the girls every day. There are men and women working perpetually for every other possible class, but none for the work-girl. She alone is left unprotected and unheeded, and no man regardeth her.

Then an Oracle came to her; the true Oracle is unsuspected and unsought—sudden. You must not go and inquire at Delphi any more. The Voice comes to you of its own accord. It came to Valentine from an old lady. There were two of them standing on the kerbstone; one carried a loaf under her apron, and the other a key. They were clean and respectable old ladies. As Valentine passed them, one said to the other, 'No, mum, it's no use expecting it; and if you want a thing done, you must do it yourself.'

These words Valentine rightly and piously accepted as an Oracle or Voice from Heaven.

The assistant priest meanwhile stood at the

door of his Institute, and watched her walking down the street with buoyant step and fearless carriage. I suppose he had seen young ladies before, but it seemed a long time, and for the space of two minutes and a half he allowed his thoughts to follow the way of most young men's thoughts in spring, though it was now full summer. In that brief interval he enjoyed in imagination a whole twelve months at least of the Blessed Life, the Life of Love and Ease and Happiness, with such a companion as Valentine. At five-and-twenty there are moments when all other things, and especially the Great Renunciation, seem stark staring Foolishness compared with the Life of Love. I believe that all women in all ages have secretly entertained this doctrine, and that all men have from time to time been tempted by it. The Light of Asia experienced many such painful moments of doubt, though his biographers have passed them over. We know, besides, how hermits and holy men have been wont to keep tubs of ice-cold water and deep snow-drifts ready against these attacks of the Devil. A terrible thing, indeed, should a young man, after he has gone a-hermiting,

meanly give it up and sneak back to his sweetheart!

Now, as Valentine walked along the street, just after she received the oracle, she encountered the very last man she would have expected to meet in Hoxton.

'You here, Mr. Conyers!'

It was, in fact, Mr. Conyers himself, and the great man appeared to be confused at the meeting. He actually blushed and stammered.

'I, yes, yes, I am here. And you, Miss Valentine?'

'I am staying with some friends.'

'Yes, I remember. Your sister told me. I thought, however, you were gone to Whitechapel. Everybody goes to Whitechapel now. I am travelling about London in search of a new face for my picture. All the faces somehow seem to have been used up.'

'Have you succeeded?'

'I hardly know yet.'

She left him and went on her way.

'She is staying with friends.' Mr. Conyers looked after her thoughtfully. 'I am glad she didn't meet me five minutes ago, with that big-eyed girl. It might have been awkward. She

is staying with friends—her own people. Violet told me as much, and Claude is looking after her. Is it likely that Lady Mildred would suffer her own daughter to live in such a place as this and be looked after by Claude? Lady Mildred may be liberal in her views, but she must think of her daughter's reputation. Oh, there cannot be any longer a doubt.'

A sweet smile—the smile of contentment—played upon his lips. He was thinking of Beatrice Eldridge and of himself, and of a perfectly easy life, with nothing to do but to enjoy and to develop, and then slowly to ripen and to decay. 'I think Valentine is better-looking than Violet,' he murmured; 'but with such a hatfull of money, who would make comparisons?'

Meantime the big-eyed girl, who was none other than Lizzie, strolled slowly homewards—it was her dinner hour—thinking of the words that she had heard once more and for the tenth time, because this man would not leave her alone. The temptation to have done with her hard and wretched work had grown almost to a desperate yearning for ease. It seemed to lie at her feet ready to be picked up.

The more she saw of Valentine the more she longed to be even as she was. The discontent which Sam wished for all women had seized upon her, but without producing quite the effect which he anticipated. Lizzie had no desire to combine with other girls. She wished, on the other hand, to run quite away from them, and never to have anything more to do with them.

In the evening Valentine sang to the boys. There were twenty or thirty of them with the Reverend Randal Smith. She played to them first, and then she sang to them, not one or two, but a dozen rattling good songs which went straight to the boys' hearts and made them all sit with open mouths. And before she sang her last song, which was that pretty old ditty about Sally in our Alley, she made a little speech.

'Boys,' she said, 'you will soon be men and able to look out for yourselves. Will you remember your sisters, the girls who cannot help themselves? You will have reasonable hours and good pay; they will have to work all day long for cruel pay. It is your business to help them—I don't know how yet—but you

must find out if others cannot. They will be your sweethearts. Can you bear to think that the girls you love are cruelly neglected and shamefully ill-used? Perhaps you will be able to make a union for them. Think of them. I shall come and sing to you again if I am allowed. Every time I come I will remind you of your duty towards your sisters—the girls who work. Now I will sing you a song all about one of them and her sweetheart.'

CHAPTER XI.

A DEAD MAN'S STEPS.

In the multitude of counsellors, as we know, purposes are established. Hitherto, however, Valentine's counsellors had advanced her no more than those of the Patriarch Job. She looked from one to the other, asking in vain the questions which everyone asks when he begins to understand the simple facts. But there was no answer from any, save from Sam, and he proposed to meet the case by simply knocking down the house of cards and building it up again.

She thought of the old lady in the almshouse. Perhaps from her she might get something practical, something that would help Melenda at least, something short of Sam's universal revolution and the Doctor's universal confederation of labour. It is by a natural instinct that mankind in all ages, and at every

juncture, have sought the advice of old women, because none are so wise as to the conduct of life, especially—which is not generally known —old women in almshouses. Their superiority is due to the happy circumstance that they have nothing to do but to observe, to reflect, and to piece together their experiences.

One must not, however, suppose that all old women know everything. Some are specialists; as, for example, those who know the art of healing, and the properties of herbs. Then there are those who understand the management of Man; it is a secret, and one man, at least, who has learned this secret, will never reveal it; but it is a very simple secret, the management of Man in all his characters, as brother, lover, father, and husband. Some, again, are deeply versed in the treatment of tender infants. Some can read and foretell the future, plain and clear, for all inquirers, either by the cards, or by the hand, or by signs and omens, or by the appearance of birds. Some can judge, with the greatest accuracy, of character from the face, or a single feature in the face, or from the voice, or the hand, or the foot. Some can read thoughts, and can advise

a man by knowing exactly what is passing in his mind. Some can charm warts and order rheumatism to vanish; and some can inform the inquirer exactly, and without any oracular indefiniteness, whether any proposed course of action will be lucky or unlucky. They are Sibyls every one. I do not know what advice Mrs. Monument would have given to Valentine's questions, because, most unfortunately, she was prevented from putting any by a very singular occurrence.

It was this: Valentine found the old lady sitting alone, and in a strange state of nervous agitation, with shaking hands and trembling lips—in the condition known to inebriates as 'jumpy.'

'What's the matter, mother?' she asked. 'Your hands are trembling, and so are your lips. Are you ill?'

'No, Polly, no. Oh, thank Heaven you've come, my dear! I don't know myself to-day. When you spoke just now I actually thought it was her ladyship's voice, and I never even heard your step outside. Give me your hand, child. There! I feel safe while you are here.'

'Why, mother, what is it?'

'I sent Rhoder away after dinner, because I couldn't bear her fidgets. I would rather go without my tea. And I went into the chapel; but I couldn't get any rest. And, oh, dear, dear! how glad I am you've come, Polly!'

'Well, mother, you will tell me presently when you feel a little stronger. You shall have your tea earlier this afternoon. I want to talk to you about Melenda.'

'What about Melenda, Polly? She's never been the good and dutiful daughter that you are. She doesn't come to see her mother but once a month, and then she's always in a rage. She came last Sunday and tore round and carried on dreadful about you and Lotty. Never mind that. What about Melenda?'

'She is working too hard and living too low. She ought to be made to do some other kind of work. What could she try?'

'I always told her—but you might as well talk to a stick or a stone—that honest service is the best thing in the world for a young woman. What is her freedom after all? She's free to walk the streets and to get into bad company; she's free to learn bad manners, and she's free to go hungry and ragged. Well, my

dear, she won't hear my advice, and—Oh, what's that?'

'It's nothing, dear,' said Valentine. 'But, mother, what makes you so nervous to-day?'

'I can't tell you, child. I can't tell anybody.'

It was useless to ask her for advice. The old lady was incoherent and incapable of thought. Valentine made haste to get ready the tea and to talk on indifferent things. And while she talked she saw that her mother either listened with an effort or did not listen at all, but suffered her lips to move in silence, while the trembling of her hands showed the disquiet of her mind.

When she had taken tea, which is a sedative and restorative of the highest order, the old lady felt herself stronger and breathed more freely.

'Polly,' she said, 'if you hadn't come to-day, I should have gone clean off my poor head, I should.'

'Well, mother, wouldn't you be easier if you told me all the trouble? Is it anything about one of the boys? Is Joe in difficulties?'

'No, no, nothing's the matter with Joe. And I can't tell Joe, because he would only laugh at me. But I must tell somebody. My dear,' she stooped forward and whispered, 'I've had a most terrible fright.'

'A fright? Did thieves try to break in—here?'

'No, Polly; no, not thieves. Bless you! I ain't afraid of thieves. It's far worse than that.'

'What was it?'

'I heard a step, Polly.'

'A step?'

'Polly, I can't tell you; the young don't understand what a dreadful thing it is to hear a step you haven't heard for twenty years—a dead man's step—and to wonder why it came and what it wanted; and then to remember all the misery that step might have caused if the dead man wasn't dead. I know he's dead. I'm quite certain of that. Yet I'm terrible put out, my dear; if I hadn't told you I think I must have gone out of my senses, so shook I am to-day. Some one I must ha' told. I couldn't tell Rhoder, because Joe would never forgive me if I did. She's one of them who is

never to know. Claude is another, and so is Sam.'

'Whose step was it like, then?'

'Polly, give me your hand again. Oh, what a blessing you are to me, my dear! Your Christian name was Marla, because he ordered it; but I've always called you Polly, and I always shall. It was the step of your own father, my dear, who's dead and gone.'

'My father? But since he is dead'—for the moment her thoughts turned to a certain portrait, that, namely, representing Sir Lancelot in his uniform as Colonel of Yeomanry Cavalry proudly bestriding a gallant charger. Then she remembered that, unlike any other girl in history, she had, in the mind of most people, two fathers. There are many girls who have only one father between them; but Valentine's is absolutely the only case on record in which a girl has had more than one father. 'Why,' she added, 'it is twenty years since my father died.'

'No, my dear, it is only five years. Joe brought me the news, and I cried for joy and thankfulness. Cried for joy, I did.'

'Only five years? But we always thought ——'

'I told her ladyship twenty years ago that he was dead. It wasn't true; and yet he was as good as dead to me and to the children; and to the world as well. I don't know whether the world or me was better pleased that he was dead to everybody. I don't know which of us prayed the hardest that he would never come to life again.'

'Why, mother, what does this mean?' The bitterness of these words, and the intensity with which they were uttered, startled and terrified Valentine. What could they mean? She turned pale with a sudden presentiment of evil.

'I told Lady Mildred a falsehood. It did her no harm, and I couldn't—no, I couldn't tell her the truth—her who'd known me when I was respectable, and didn't even guess what had happened. It was my secret all to myself and to Joe. There's some things a woman can't tell. As for the truth, Joe and me knew it, and nobody else, and I was then on Hackney Marsh out of the way, and there was plenty of time before me even if he should come back,

and I thought to get the children put out to work so as he shouldn't know where they were nor ever be able to do them any harm, or bring shame upon them as he brought it on me.'

'Do them harm? Bring shame upon them? Why?'

'You don't know, Polly. But I'll tell you now, because I can talk to you as I can't to Melenda or the boys; and oh, my dear, I feel the comfort of having a daughter I can talk to.'

'Go on, mother,' said Valentine.

'Well then, my dear, if there was ever a wickeder man than your father in the whole world, Lord help his wife and children! And if ever there was a man who was more bent on wicked ways and more gloried in his wicked life, I never heard of him.'

'Where was he then, when he was dead to you and——' Here she stopped, and her cheek flamed suddenly scarlet as if she had received a shameful blow, for she understood where he was. Those who are dead to wife and children, yet living: those whose living death is a subject of rejoicing in the world, are in——

'Mother,' she said, 'he was in prison.'

'Hush! my dear,' her mother whispered,

'not so loud. Yes, he was in prison. Hush! don't ever say that word out loud again. Nobody knows it but Joe and me. Joe was old enough to know when he was took. Thank God, the knowledge of it frightened him and helped to make him the sober steady man he is. No one else knows—not Joe's wife nor yet his children. They don't know. And none of the rest knows, not Sam, nor Claude, nor Melenda. Don't you tell them, Polly—don't you never tell them. Sam's that proud and set up with his grand position and his success that it would cut him to the heart, and my Claude, too, though, of course, he isn't to compare with Sam. Don't make them hang their proud heads. And Melenda, too—bless the girl—with her independence. Don't shame them, Polly, don't tell them.'

'I shall not tell. Oh, mother, why did you tell me?' she asked impatiently.

'When you came here without any play actin', and leaving Miss Beatrice at home with her Mar and kind and thoughtful for your mother, my dear; oh, what a blessing it is to have my Polly back again'—Valentine kissed her and fondled her hand, penitent already for

her impatience—'full of your soft and ladylike ways, my dear, which Melenda couldn't never learn, living as she does, slaving and starving, it came into my head that I must some day tell you. What's the good of having a daughter if you can't tell everything that is in your mind?'

'Tell me everything,' said Valentine with a sinking heart. 'Tell me everything, then, if it will relieve your mind, dear.'

'I wouldn't have told you anything, my dear, if it hadn't been for that dreadful step which frightened me out of my wits almost. It was nigh upon the stroke of ten, because I heard the clock soon afterwards. I'd forgotten to lock the door; why, I often leave it ajar when I go to bed so as Rhoder can get in first thing in the morning. I was fast asleep—I must have been asleep though I dreamed I was awake, and all of a sudden in my dream of being awake I heard his step. It came over the flags within the court and walking quickly, as he always walked, stopped at my door and so into the house.'

'Oh!' Valentine was trembling now, because that strange horror, which we call the fear of the supernatural, is the most catching

thing in the world, much more catching than measles. 'Oh! and then you heard his footstep on the flagstones?'

'Yes, and in the house; the step came into the room below. I don't know how long it lasted because I couldn't move hand or foot, and I couldn't breathe even, and my tongue was tied and I couldn't open my mouth. Oh, dear, it was last night.' She stopped, overcome by the recollection of that dreadful dream.

'When I came to I got up and crept downstairs and felt about the room. But no one was there. How should there be? Blind people can't see ghosts, like other people, but they can feel them if there's one about. There was a blind woman once in the village when I was a girl, and they said the reason why she always looked frightened was that she was haunted by the ghost of her husband. He'd sit beside her bed all night and say nothing, and she couldn't see him, but she felt him there, and if all tales about her was true, it served her right. She died young, my dear, because she couldn't bear it. If one blind woman, why not two? Perhaps he came repentant. Well, I'm ready

to forgive him, now he's dead; I couldn't before.' Many Christians resemble Mrs. Monument in this view of forgiveness as a duty.

'You are quite sure there was no one there?'

'Neither man nor ghost was there, and the door was ajar just as I'd left it.'

'And was nothing stolen?'

'No, my dear; there isn't anything worth stealing.'

'It was a strange dream,' said Valentine; 'a strange and a dreadful dream. Did you hear the step again when you went back to bed?'

'No, my dear, not again. But I lay awake all night waiting for it, though I knew it was only a dream.'

'Shall I stay with you to-night?'

'No, my dear, I am better now I've told you. I am not afraid any longer.'

'Well, don't forget to lock and bolt your door.'

'Locks and bolts won't keep out ghosts. And never a lock nor a bolt ever made would keep *him* out when he was alive, much less now he's dead.'

'Forget your dream, mother, and tell me more about my father. Tell me all, unless it gives you pain to talk about him.'

'No, my dear, it eases me, because if I don't talk about him I think about him. I almost wish I hadn't told you anything, Polly. It won't make you any happier to know that. But then I was so upset——'

'Yes, mother, it was better for you. I know now that my father's only legacy to his children was a record of disgrace which you have mercifully concealed.'

'Disgrace and shame, Polly,' the blind woman echoed.

Presently she went on again.

'When he came to the village first and began courting, my head was turned because he was such a handsome lad and I was such a homely one. His ways were finicking, as if he was a gentleman, and there was nothing that he couldn't do. He'd play the fiddle, which he did most heavenly, till you either laughed, or cried, or danced, just as he wanted you to do; he could do conjuring tricks, and he'd make you believe whatever rubbish he wanted; he could carve most beautiful in wood; and at his own

trade, which was locksmithing, I don't suppose there was a cleverer lad in the world. Well, I never asked him what he came into our parts for, and though there was three houses broke open while he was coming and going, nobody ever suspected my James, and least of all could I suspect him. And on Sunday always in his place at church beside me with his book in his hand, so that the vicar thought he was a good young man indeed, and everybody told me I was a lucky woman. A proud woman I was, I can tell you, when I stood with my man and all the people there to see. Little Lady Mildred herself was brought to the wedding because I'd been under-nurse, and she gave me my white frock, at least her mother did, and said it was her gift, and — there — it's seven-and-thirty years ago. Joe is six-and-thirty, and you are only twenty, but close to twenty-one, being actually fifteen years younger than Joe. My dear,' she interrupted her narrative in order to apologise for this difference, 'I know it is natural there oughtn't to be such a distance between the eldest and the youngest of five. You ought to be thirty at least by now if you had your right. But I couldn't help it because

your father, you see, he was generally in the place—the place, you know, where he died at last.'

'You mean he was in prison,' said Valentine stoutly, 'and don't mind about the difference between Joe and me. I daresay I shall get to thirty in good time.'

'In prison then, my dear. Now though we came to London at first to look for work, I very soon found out that he hadn't got any regular work, and wouldn't take it if it was offered. Half his time he was away, saying it was country jobs which paid him well, and he'd be away sometimes a month at a spell, after which there would be a month's idleness and doing nothing. But always plenty of money and better living we had than many a gentleman's house.'

'Did he have any relations?'

'No; not any that I ever heard of—some of the books here on my shelves belonged, he said, to his father; and he said his father was a gentleman, but what kind of a gentleman he was to have such a son I'm sure I don't know. Well, Polly, I lived, as they say, in Fool's Paradise; for he never got drunk and he didn't use language and he was not a striker, and

though he would only work when he was obliged and left me so much alone, I loved him and thought I was the happiest woman in the world. Happy? Yes, like the innocent lambs in the fields. It was when Joe was a baby of three months that I found out the truth. He got ten years'—Valentine shuddered—'ten years. It was a bad burglary. His box of tools was in our lodgings and a chest full of stolen things, and they talked of trying me along with him, but they didn't. My dear, I never so much as suspected. Ten years! Then I took Joe and all the money that I had and went away to Hackney Marsh, and took my maiden name again, and began with the washing.'

'And after his ten years he came back again, I suppose?'

'Before then; he came back with a ticket-of-leave, and you may be sure he found me out. I don't know how, but he did; and you might as well try to hide a rabbit from a weasel as try to hide anything from that man. He came back, my dear; and then he lived a very strange life. For he told me he had reformed, and yet he would stay away for a month at a time, and

a fine reform it was. He kept quiet when he was at home and gave out to the neighbours he was a seafaring man, and he mostly wore a blue jacket. He never took any of my money and I wouldn't touch none of his, and he never had any meals in the house, but he'd sit in the parlour and read his books, and he'd smoke cigars and drink port wine like a gentleman, all by himself. Twice he went away and didn't come back for eighteen months, so I suppose he'd been took again. But after each spell back he came, and that went on, my dear, for seven long years—seven years—me asking no questions, and him telling no lies, and coming and going just as he pleased. Seven years. Sam came first, and then Claude, and then Melenda. But before you were born, my dear, though not before your name was fixed, which was Marla, as I've told you often, he was took again. It was another burglary, I know, with violence, and he got five-and-twenty years, which Joe said was as good as a lifer, and we needn't expect to see him ever again.'

'Is that all?'

'That's all, my dear. And now you and me have got that secret between us, and we are

never to let the two boys nor Melenda know, are we?'

'Never to let the boys know,' said Valentine. 'Oh, poor Claude!'

'If they never find it out it won't matter to them, will it?' said his mother. 'Joe's wife and the children don't know it. Nobody knows it except you and me and Joe. Sometimes I think it's made Joe the good son he's always been to me, because we've had that secret to ourselves.'

'Since he is dead—but is he dead?'

'Yes, he is dead,' she replied quickly; 'Joe heard that for certain. There's no doubt about that.'

'Did he never write to you?'

'Never, and I'll tell you why. It was because he thought my cottage was such a good hiding-place, where he could come and go as he pleased and never be suspected at all, and me living under another name. Only mind, I wouldn't have any boxes brought home with him. You see, if he'd written to me the police would have known where to look for him. Why, I've known him—oh, a dozen times—talk to the policeman over the garden palings

about himself and his own burglaries as cool as you please.'

'What was his name?'

'His name was Carey — James Carey. Why, my dear, you are too young to remember it, but thirty years ago the newspapers were full of his name, and the whole country was ringing with his burglaries. They wrote a life of him and sold it for a penny all over London. But of course you've never seen the book.'

No. Valentine had little wish to see that biographical work. Yet there was just a touch of pride in the old woman's mention of that book.

'Look on the shelves, Polly. There are some of his books. You will find his father's name in them. At least he said they were his father's books; but who knows what his name really was, nor what was his history?'

Valentine had remarked a row of well-bound books on her first visit; chiefly, I suppose, because books are not too often met with in a Tottenham almshouse. Now she took them down and examined them. The first book was the 'Divina Commedia di Dante

Alighieri,' in Italian; a beautifully bound copy of a scarce edition, as Valentine knew. One does not usually expect to find rare editions in an almshouse. She passed on to the next on the shelf. This was 'Cupid and Psyche, English'd from the Latin of Apuleius,' quarto, in calf, with the date 1741. Then came 'Froissart's Chronicles,' in four goodly volumes, quarto, and half-calf, the translations of Johnnes. After this came an odd volume of Hutchinson's 'Durham;' then another odd volume of La Fontaine's 'Contes et Nouvelles,' illustrated very beautifully; then two or three volumes of Florian's works, magnificently bound. There were others, but Valentine stopped there because she suddenly apprehended the possible meaning of this thing.

If I desired to possess, and intended to show about for the gratification of vanity and the support of my pretensions to gentle birth, something solid and not to be disputed, I should not content myself with the ordinary well-known methods. I might, like some of my neighbours, invent and circulate family anecdotes which unkind friends would proceed to quote and to misrepresent in a nasty sniggering

spirit. I might, also, as they do, adorn my rooms with family portraits which may be had at a reasonable figure, and are effective so long as there exists a friendly disposition to a give-and-take credulity. I might, in addition, exhibit a family pedigree, going back to the Wars of the Roses at least, and beginning with a valiant knight supposed to be connected with a very illustrious house; this, too, may be procured for a small sum, beautifully written on parchment, and adorned with shields. I should certainly stick up, wherever there was room for them, coats of mail, with trophies of spears, shields, bucklers, and pikes, all family heirlooms, and descending in the male line direct from the Crusaders and Cœur de Lion. I should buy old silver mugs, and have my arms engraved upon them with the names of ancestors. These things are all useful in their way, but they want corroboration. Therefore I should proceed to search for, and to buy, old books of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, *without names in them*, and in these books I should write the names of my ancestors in a pale brown ink, with the date of acquisition and a remark or two in Latin.

Nothing is so effective as Latin. I should arrange them upon a shelf about the average height of the human eye, which is five feet seven inches, and I should say, when my friends took them down curiously, 'Alas! all that I have been able to save of the old family library. You will find the names of one or two of my people there. See! here is good old Sir Simon, knighted by Queen Bess, at Tilbury.' There might be jealousies and envyings, and unkind remembrance of one's grandfather and the shop; but there would be no flouts or jeers, because nothing more effectually proves the antiquity of the House than old books formerly belonging to ancestors. For modest men it is perhaps sufficient to prove that your grandfather could read Latin and Italian; therefore, books only eighty years of age might be purchased in order to serve that purpose.

Valentine opened the volumes. In each one there was a book plate with a coat of arms, and under the shield in each was written the name of 'Francis Denison Carey.' Therefore the said Francis must have known Italian and French at least, and he must have been fond of books and bindings, and illustrations, and he

must have taken an interest in county history, and therefore, without doubt, he must have been a gentleman by birth.

'Were these books my father's?' she asked.

'They were all his, my dear, and his father's before him.'

'Who was his father?'

'I don't know, my dear, because he never told me. I've always thought my husband must have been a love child. He left them with me wherever he went. To be sure he couldn't take them with him when he——'

'No,' said Valentine, 'certainly he could not.'

Even an author's works cannot follow him into that place, though they may, and generally do, accompany him to the grave.

'Then his father was a gentleman.'

'So he always said, my dear. But a love child I think he must have been. And he said that he'd got fine relations; and then he'd laugh and boast that he was bringing great honour on the family, though they would do nothing for him.'

'It is strange,' said Valentine. 'Did he never explain how he came to fall so low?'

'No, never; and as to being fallen low he

pretended he'd risen high, and couldn't own that his way of living was shameful and disgraceful. "Why," he said, a dozen times after he pretended to be reformed, and could talk Scripture by the half-hour, "why," he said, "it's me against the world: my cleverness against your locks, and your laws, and your police. And I'm the head of them all. There's not a man in the profession but envies me and admires me. Who is there that's got into so many houses as I have? Who's defied the police as I have?" That's the way he used to go on, and as to living by honest work it was nothing but slaving for a slave driver: if he couldn't be a slave driver he wouldn't be a slave.'

'And was he any the richer for his robberies?'

'I don't know, my dear, where the money went, because I never asked. But it went in wickedness, I dare say.'

'Oh!' cried Valentine, stung by a sudden terror. 'Suppose he wasn't dead after all; what misery to see him appear again!'

'He is dead,' said the widow, quietly. 'It was his ghost whose step I heard. Well

may he walk and be uneasy. If he wasn't dead he'd ha' been out before now. But I know very well that he's dead and buried. And, oh, Polly, I'm half sorry after all that I told you!'

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOOING OF THE SPHYNX.

No intelligence, letter, or news of any kind, was to come from her own people to Valentine during her Retreat. She was to be completely cut off; as much as if she had been expelled the family circle. A hard measure, yet Lady Mildred was a wise woman, and no doubt had her reasons. Valentine was to hear nothing, whatever happened. With the exception of one episode, very little, indeed, happened. Lady Mildred and Violet went to Ilfracombe, and presently Mr. Conyers made his appearance there. This was the single episode of interest. He stayed for three weeks; and he came, as was immediately apparent, with the intention of making himself, if possible, pleasing to Violet.

Ilfracombe in the season is an admirable place in which to study with thoughtfulness

the character and the charms of a young lady, especially if she be not surrounded by other young ladies, and if she is permitted a certain amount of freedom, and if there are no other students of the same young lady about the place. In all these respects Mr. Conyers had the greatest possible advantages; he had the field to himself, and he was allowed every opportunity of carrying on this singularly attractive study. He walked with Lady Mildred and Violet on the Capstone Rock; he drove about the country with them; and he accompanied Violet when she went sketching; he was even permitted to go sailing with her. She had a boat of her own, and a boatman specially engaged for her own service. But there is generally a swell upon the ocean off Ilfracombe, and too often while Violet sat, rope in hand, bright of eye, and light of heart, when the white sail flew round the headlands, the young man beside her was fain to preserve silence, while his eyes assumed a fishy glare and his cheek was blanched.

'I am watching them,' wrote Lady Mildred; 'he may amuse Violet, but I am certain he will not touch her heart. To begin with, he is

not exactly—well, there are gentlemen of many kinds, I suppose, and he knows how to conduct himself; but he is not exactly a gentleman after our kind; I do not hear anything about his people, but I suppose they are not distinguished, or we should have heard about them. He does not ride, or shoot, or hunt; he does not know anybody, and I do not know where he comes from. He does not strike one as having lived with clever people, or well-bred people, or rich people; and I dare say he is quite poor. If he is going to succeed in his work, it may help him a little to know people like ourselves. Perhaps, as you say, Bertha, he is in hopes of marrying an heiress. Let us give him every chance then.'

His best chance was when Violet went sketching, and he could carry her things and talk to her while she sat at work. He had learned from certain journals a patois criticism —every kind of patois is necessarily a debased form of the real language—and this he talked, borrowing the ideas, which are misty, of this school, as well as its tongue, and pretending that they were his own. It seems a great pity that Nature, when she created this man so

ardently desirous of distinction, gave him no ideas of his own. What is genius without ideas?

From talk of Art to talk of Love is a natural step. Love-making, indeed, may be made, in capable hands, a most artistic chapter of life, and one to be remembered ever afterwards with feelings of the liveliest satisfaction. It is most mortifying to think that most of us throw away and waste the most splendid chances while they are in our hands, hurrying the situation, scamping the dialogue, and simply ruining the 'business.' Some men, for instance, have actually been known to propose by letter; while even of poets, who ought to know better, and dramatists, and novelists, not to speak of painters, all of whom should be perpetually studying situation and getting the most business possible out of every tableau, there are few who have extracted from their own love passages anything like the amount of emotion, incident, and pathos which they should have yielded.

In this case Jack Conyers made no headway at all. It seemed as if the girl, in the most innocent way possible, purposely diverted

every advance into another direction. All roads in conversation may lead up to love, but there are cross lanes at every other step into which one may turn. Violet willingly walked with him and talked with him, but she showed no sign of taking the least interest in him.

By this time he had completely satisfied himself that Lady Mildred would never have allowed her own daughter to live alone or among quite poor people in such a place as Hoxton. None of the ladies of his own family would have considered such an arrangement possible—there were ladies in his own family, though he never spoke of them, and did not invite them to his chambers in Piccadilly. Of course they knew, although they certainly did not belong to quite the very best circles, what was proper and what was improper. The Great Middle Class especially knows what is proper. It did not occur to Mr. Conyers as even possible that any young lady, much less a young lady who was the daughter of a baronet and the granddaughter of an earl, could dare to disregard those laws of propriety which are held as sacred as the Decalogue by the whole of Bourgeoisie.

He was so certain that he was going to risk his fate. He would make a determined effort. Somehow, although every morning he resolved upon proposing that very day, he never succeeded. He was constantly alone with the girl. Lady Mildred allowed her to go about as she pleased. He was in her boat, well off the coast with her; no one else but the old boatman within hearing; he was standing beside her while she sat and painted all the summer morning through; he was strolling with her over the cliffs to Lee, or inland, where the sea mists sweep up the narrow coombe; he sat with her on the Capstone Rock, while the waves rolled up against that great headland, and outside the harbour the pleasure-boats rolled and rocked and gave the people inside such exquisite pleasure that they all held their heads over the side and begged and prayed to be taken ashore instantly. And all the time he talked, and all the time he felt with a sinking heart that he was making no impression.

He made a last effort on the day before he came away.

'I must go back to town,' he said with a

sigh. 'This has been a very pleasant holiday. I shall remember it all my life. But Work calls.'

'I thought yours was a kind of work which could wait till you chose to do it, Mr. Conyers. You have no work that you must do, have you?'

'Mine is Art work,' he replied reproachfully, because she ought to have understood. 'Of course, therefore, I wait until it calls me.'

'Oh! you wait for inspiration; and now it has come. That is why, all the time you have been down here, you have done nothing. I am only a feeble creature, but I must be always drawing. Well, and have you got your inspiration at last? And is it overwhelming?'

It seemed as if she was actually laughing at him.

'If I thought that anything concerning myself could interest you——'

'It does, Mr. Conyers. I am interested about all my friends. You are one of my friends, are you not? Besides, I am rather curious about you.'

'Are you really curious about me?'

'Yes. I want to know what you really can do. You see, Mr. Conyers, we have had a

great many talks about Art, both in Florence and here; but I have never seen any of your work. Surely you have done something by this time. Claude tells me you used to draw very well at Cambridge.'

'I will show you some day. You understand that a man may not desire to let his immature work be seen. I will tell you, in my own studio, if you let me, something of my aims, perhaps.'

'As you please. But are they mysterious? If you are an artist, of course you propose to be a great artist. Claude is a lawyer, and desires to be a great lawyer.'

'My ambitions shall not be mysterious—to you.'

'Do not confide secrets to me, Mr. Conyers. I am the worst person in the world to keep them.'

'If you are curious—that is, interested—in anyone, you like to know everything about him, do you not?'

'You mean about his family connections?'

She was thinking of her own; but the question reminded him how awkward it might be if he should have to explain certain things,

and how difficult it might be to put them so that they should look really picturesque—almost everything may be made to look picturesque with proper handling, though the paternal profession and the 'girls' would require delicate handling when it came to explaining and introducing.

'Fortunately, my own family connections are well known,' said Violet lightly. 'Claude and I come of an old family; on both sides, I believe, a family older than the Conquest.'

'But you do not know—it is not certain ——'

'Well then, Mr. Conyers, we will leave it uncertain until October, and then, if you please, you shall show us some of your work, and explain some of your aims; though, if I were you, I should think less of the aims and more of the work.'

The most stupid man in the world could not fail to perceive that the subject must be deferred till after the coming of age. But he did something to show the disinterested nature of his passion—he went to Lady Mildred and begged for a few words with her.

'It is, briefly, Lady Mildred,' he said, 'that

I have ventured to fall in love with one of your daughters.'

'You mean Violet?' she asked coldly.

'I have not presumed to speak to her. I do not know whether she regards me with any favour at all. But I have seen her every day here—thanks to your kindness.'

'And you think you are in love with her?'

'I ask only one thing, permission to take my chance; your permission to speak when you return to town. I have, I confess, but a slender fortune, though I have large ambitions. My future,' he added, proudly, 'is, I believe, in my own hands. It may be a distinguished future.'

'Every woman desires a distinguished husband,' said Lady Mildred. 'But it would be a dreadful disappointment were promises not fulfilled, would it not? If you place any reliance on your genius, Mr. Conyers, it would be well to have some first-fruits ready. But indeed it is not genius that I desire for Violet so much as certain other qualities. You know the history of the two girls?'

'One is the sister of my dear friend, Claude Monument. The other is your own daughter.'

'One is an heiress and the other has nothing.'

'Believe me, Lady Mildred, I should be happy indeed with Violet even in the latter case.'

'That is well said'—it was fairly well said—but there wanted what we call the true ring. 'That is well said; and now, Mr. Conyers, as you might be tempted to tell Violet all this at once, I beg you will go away, and if you are in the same mind in October, when we return, you have my full permission to speak to her.'

He went away, hardly satisfied; he returned to London. Town was quite empty, but Alicia was at home; there was always dinner for him—a good dinner—such as Alicia loved, with the beautiful claret, which she also loved, served in the great silver claret jug; dinner laid on the massive mahogany table, in the room with the huge sideboard and the pictures of game and fruit, all betokening a solid income and the substantial results of successful trading, with Alicia herself to talk about the old times before he set up for a fine gentleman and a great artist and a man of culture and sweetness, and was only a conceited handsome boy, who

liked drawing girls' heads, and looked a good deal at his own face in the glass, and gave himself airs, and talked about himself to the girl five or six years older, who lived in the adjacent villa at Stockwell, and belonged to folk of like standing with himself. He liked this talking over the old times with her. She was a person of no imagination; she always laughed at his pretensions; she told him the whole truth; and she never swerved from the doctrine that there is but one thing in the world worth striving for, and that is the thing for which all good business people diligently strive—a solid income—all the rest being pure illusion.

For other distractions there was the girl at Hoxton. Something had come over this girl; a change in her manner and her talk; she had grown shy with him; the careless common talk of the streets, which formerly flowed freely from her lips, in a great measure disappeared —'it is the influence of my conversation,' he said. She was now dressed better; she had a newly trimmed hat, and a new frock, and new boots; and quite suddenly she began to fill out in figure and to improve; her face was no

longer promising, it was really pretty ; she had more than a pair of large and expressive eyes, and she carried herself uprightly. All this was the result of Valentine's dinners, Valentine's example, and Valentine's gifts. The girl was quick to learn : she was shy with this lover of hers because she understood that the situation was serious, and she was afraid of what was before her. Melenda declared that Valentine would soon go away and forget them. She also—her name should have been Cassandra—foretold the approaching death of Lotty. Then the old life would begin again ; but it would be worse—far worse—because she had now learned and knew what the easier life was like. Of course she ought not to have gone on meeting him ; Valentine would be very angry if she knew ; and yet the future that awaited her—and then—when it began— if this man should still want her to go away and become his Model, what should she say?

'Mr. Conyers is gone, Violet dear,' said Lady Mildred ; 'are you sorry?'

'Rather. He amused us, did he not? I like talking to a downright affected man.

Besides, I was pleased to watch his love for Beatrice. There is nobody he would so much like to marry as that young lady. He thinks he can deceive me into believing that he is in love with me.'

'Violet!'

'But he is a wretched actor. One sees through him every moment.'

'My dear child!'

'I wonder if he can really do anything. Claude says he used to draw. I dare say he has some talent. But when a man calls himself an artist, and for three whole weeks never touches a pencil, and goes out with one and looks on without offering to draw or paint anything at all—my dear mamma, I fear that Mr. Conyers is a humbug.'

'He has asked permission to address you, Violet; I have given him that permission, but I have put it off until we return.'

'Thank you, dear. I wonder where he comes from. He seems to know nobody. Well—I wonder what Valentine is doing now—poor Valentine! with Melenda! Mamma, I am quite, quite sure, that Beatrice—Mr. Conyers made a mistake when he gave you my name—will refuse that man.'

CHAPTER XIII.

A USELESS CRIME.

LIFE is entirely made up of coincidences, though in novels, which should be pictures of real life, as much is generally made out of a coincidence as if the thing was unusual. That is because, although it is common, it is dramatic. One need not be surprised, therefore, to hear that Valentine heard more about the man James Carey, and that from quite an unexpected quarter.

It was from none other than the old letter-writer, Mr. Lane.

Valentine met him one evening soon after she had received that confession at the Alms house. He was creeping along the pavement on his way home, his shoulders were stooping, his head more bowed, his coat more ragged than when first she made his acquaintance. She stopped him and offered him her hand. He

did not take it, but he made as if he would take off his hat. This habit, as has been already remarked, is an indestructible proof of good breeding. Another sign is the handling of the knife and fork. A third is the pronunciation of the English language. Mr. Lane did not carry out his intention of taking off his hat, because he remembered in time that the brim was like the maiden in the ditty, because at a touch it would yield. Yet the gesture moved Valentine with pity because it reminded her that the man had once been a gentleman. And how, by what cruelty or misconduct, had he fallen from the ranks?'

'May I walk with you?' she asked. 'We are going the same way.'

They were in the Curtain Road, and it was on Saturday evening, when the furniture warehouses are all closed, and the German journeymen, if wicked report be true, are all locked up in their attics without coats, hats, or boots, so that they cannot get abroad until the Monday morning, and then they must go to work again, and cannot expect or ask to get out of doors until Saturday night.

The loneliness of Curtain Road on Saturday

evening is as the desolation of Tadmor in the Desert, but the smell of varnish serves to connect the place with the handiwork of man.

'Surely,' replied Mr. Lane, 'surely. It is long since a young lady walked with me—very long. It is five-and-thirty years.'

She perceived that he walked feebly and that his knees trembled.

'I am going to take a cup of coffee, Mr. Lane. Will you take one with me?'

'You wish to give me a cup of coffee.' He laughed a light, musical, but not a mirthful laugh. 'It is kind of you. I will accept it with pleasure.'

He had been down on his luck all day, as he presently told her in the coffee-house. Here she gave him a chop with his coffee, and thus afforded him an opportunity of displaying the little mannerisms with a knife and fork which characterise English gentlemen all the world over. His luck had been very bad, it appeared, for many weeks, so that when the rent was paid there was not always enough to satisfy the wants of the machine. This evening especially he was much run down, and the unexpected chop

brought a sense of physical comfort which he had not known for a great while.

'I thank you again,' he said, when he had finished. 'I am sunk low indeed, for I am not humiliated by the gift of a supper.'

'Do not speak of humiliation,' she replied; 'are we not friends and neighbours?'

'Neighbours certainly. By divine goodness. Friends?—hardly. Men like me have neighbours—the lower we sink the more neighbours we have. But friends?—no, we have no friends. Friendship begins much higher up. First comes the man who struggles and starves side by side with another in the mud; there is no end of his labour, neither is his eye satisfied with riches—for he gets none; he and his fellows touch each other as they search for food, like midges flying in a cloud beside the river; but these men are not friends. Then there are work-fellows on board the same ship and in the same workshop. They are companions, but not friends. And there are the men who are engaged in the same tricks. They call themselves pals, but they are not friends. Friendship, young lady, can only be formed at a certain stage of civilisation.'

'Oh! But there are such friendships as those of Lotty and Melenda and your daughter Lizzie.'

'The girls club together and fight against starvation. Call them friends if you please. But—' he paused and considered. 'There are some old lines in my head—

> Love seeketh not itself to please,
> Nor for itself hath any care.

Who can seek for anything but for himself when he is hungry? Starving people have no room for friendship or for natural affection. My daughter eats her bread and drinks her tea in one room—I eat my bread in another. She goes her way, and I do not ask—I have no right to ask—what way it is. Friends?—we have no friends.'

'The lines are Blake's,' said Valentine, somewhat astonished.

'Possibly. I have forgotten. Shall we go home?'

When they reached Ivy Lane, Valentine went with him unasked into his room.

'Will you tell me something about your dream?' she asked.

'About my dream? Oh! yes. About my

dream. It is a dream which goes on continually. It has gone on for five-and-thirty years. My dream? It is my life. The rest is a vain show and shadow—a procession of days and hours which are possessed of mocking devils, except when you come to me. And even you are part of the show and seeming. That is not my life. No one would live such a life as that. You are a dream, and Ivy Lane is a dream, and Lizzie is a dream, and all the hunger and poverty and misery are part of a dream. But what you call my dream is my reality—my life. Stay—you do not know the beginning.'

'I shall guess the beginning, perhaps, if you tell me where you are at present.'

'They have offered the man in my dream a bishopric. It is unusual so soon after a deanery has been refused. He is to be the new Bishop of Winchester. It was always his ambition to be Bishop of the Diocese in which he was born, and where there is Portsmouth with the ships and sailors. His father, you know, was a sailor—middy at Copenhagen and Lieutenant at Trafalgar—so that he always loved sailors. One can understand how great an honour this invitation seems to him.'

'Will he accept it?'

'Surely—surely. It is a mark of the Divine Blessing on his life and labours. Besides, he who desireth the office of a bishop desireth a good work. This man has always looked forward to it as to the crown of his career; yet humbly, because it brings heavy responsibilities. The consecration will take place immediately. Meantime he meditates upon his duties. To-night he will meditate more deeply and with more spiritual advantage because I have eaten well. So closely united are soul and body.'

'The beginning, as I read it,' said Valentine, 'is that five-and-thirty years ago you were a clergyman?'

There was, indeed, something in the appearance and carriage of the man, in spite of his rags, which suggested the clerical calling. Impossible to say exactly what was the peculiarity, but it existed.

'I was once a clergyman,' he answered simply. 'I dream of my own life—as it might have been.'

'Please go on.'

'My eldest son—I was married thirty-five

years ago—has just obtained a University Scholarship; my second is doing well at Winchester—my old school; my daughters are sitting with me in my study; and my wife—but she is dead.' A change came over the man's face. Was his wife, then, not altogether a dream?

Valentine waited to hear more.

'Five-and-thirty years ago,' he said, 'I was thirty, and I was married—not long married—when the dreadful thing happened to me. Good God! Why was it suffered to happen?'

'Do not talk about it. Forget it if you can and go on with your Dream.'

'I must talk about it. There come times when I am constrained to tell some one, even if it kills me to tell it. Last time I told it to the Doctor. He came here yesterday to see me, but he only talked about you.' Valentine blushed. 'He is in love with you. Of course he is in love with you. Everybody must be, you know that. It was not last night that I told him, but long ago—months ago—the last time that I was forced to tell it.' His face was agitated and his fingers twisted nervously. 'I must tell you.'

'But it agitates and pains you. Do not tell me. Talk about your dream.'

'No, no—sometimes I understand that my dream is only a dream, and the real life is here, among these rags; and then I must tell someone, even if it kills me.'

'He came to the village and lodged there three months, at the village inn. We all got to know him. The Vicar at the Vicarage—that was myself—and Sir William at the House. He went about among us all, smooth-spoken and well-behaved; not a gentleman exactly, but a man who could sit with gentlemen. He came to church every Sunday; he played the violin beautifully, and I played the violoncello, and my wife the piano—it is not often that a good player comes to a village—and we had trios. I was married—yes, I had been married for six months. I should have been married before but for some college debts. I don't think there was anybody in the world happier than I was all that summer.'

'Hush! Do not excite yourself; tell the story quietly.'

'Tell the story—tell *my* story quietly? Oh! you don't know.' His cheeks were

white, his face was working, and his body writhing with the excitement of his story.

'But you are right. The Doctor said I must keep quiet if I could. I will try. It was in the same summer that the great burglary took place at the House, and her ladyship's jewels were stolen. I have sometimes thought that, perhaps, James Carey did that too!'

'Who? What was the name?'

'James Carey was his name. James Carey.'

'James Carey!' Somehow she was not surprised. There could not have been two of that name—villains both. Yet it was strange to hear about him so soon again, and in this very house under the same roof with his daughter. What new villainy was she about to hear?

'When you have heard the story you will get up and go away.'

'No, no—I shall not.'

'It is a story of a great villain and a wretched sinner. There was a certain old debt, undischarged, which troubled me.' He told his story in jerks, stalking across the room,

and throwing about his arms. 'The man threatened. I could pay him in three months, but he refused to wait. I was in dreadful trouble about it. The man Carey wormed himself into my confidence, and I told him. I was trustee, with another man, for a child. She had some money invested in our names. Carey showed me what to do. I ought not to have listened. I might have gone to that other man, my co-trustee; he would have lent me the money; but I was ashamed. Carey told me how to do it. Well, I was tempted, and I fell —a preacher of God's judgments—and I fell. I drew a cheque—it was for a hundred and twenty pounds. I signed it with my name; Carey signed my fellow-trustee's name—out of friendliness, he said. In this way, you see, I became a forger—yes, a wretched criminal—a forger. Why don't you get up and go away? I was to draw the money and to pay it back in six months' time; no one would ever know anything about it. He was the actual forger, but I was his accomplice—his equal in guilt. Oh! I have never complained of what followed. I deserve everything, and more. I do not complain, except sometimes, that men are made so

weak. Nothing that has been done to me is equal to what I did to myself. I was such a fool, too—oh, I remember. When we had signed the cheque, Carey went to the bank to draw the money for me. Well,'—he stopped and laughed—'what do you think? He never came back—he never came back with the money.'

'Do you mean that he kept the money?'

'That is what he did. But I was a forger. Why, it was found out at once—I don't know how. My writing was well known: experts swore that the forgery was by me, too. My desk was found full of imitations. Carey had put them there. They found out about the creditor and his threats. There was no defence possible except that another man had drawn the money. I do not complain; but sometimes I think he was a greater villain than myself. I was only a poor contemptible wretch, born for such a lot as this.'

'The man Carey,' said Valentine, 'is dead.'

'Is he dead? Is he dead?'—he spoke as if he was disappointed—'I cannot think that he is dead. Because for five-and-thirty years I have always thought to meet him face to face,

Dead! And my own course is nearly run! Great Heavens! What a course!'

He gasped and laid his hand upon his heart. But the spasm passed.

'I have suffered penal servitude. I have been cut off from my fellows. All this I deserved. I have been disgraced and exiled and starved. I do not complain. But surely the other man should have had something!'

'He died in prison. He received a harder punishment than you.'

'He—died—in—prison.' There was consolation in the fact. 'I thought that I should die before him, so as to be ready with my testimony against him when he should come before the Judge.'

'Forgive him,' said Valentine. 'Forgive the dead, who can sin no more.'

'"Their love and their hatred is now finished; neither have they a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun." Thus saith the Book.'

'Then forgive him.'

'No; I cannot forgive him until the Day shall come when I can forgive myself. And that will be—never. Oh! men talk of for-

giveness; but how can they ever forgive themselves?'

'Then do not speak of the man again. Tell me of your life since then. You found love. You have your daughter.'

'Love! Do you think in such depths as mine there is room for love? I found a miserable girl in the streets, a girl as wretched as my daughter is now; as poor, as starved, as hardly worked, more cruelly robbed. I married her. Why? I suppose to save her from a little of the pain. Oh! I did not ask if the other wife was dead; all that belonged to the past life, which was gone. I married her; and perhaps she was less miserable for a while—I think she was—and then she died. I found money enough to pay some other poor wretches for the keep of the child. You know her—what she is. I have been able to do no more for her.'

'Poor man! Poor child!' Valentine took his hand—the long nervous hand, thin and bony as a skeleton's.

'She is the child of the gutter, which has been her playground as well as her cradle, and will be her grave. What can you expect? Has she any of a woman's virtues? I do not

know. They are not wanted in the gutter. Let her live her life out with the other gutter children, and then lie down and die. Perhaps, after she is dead she will find out why any of us were born, and what it means.'

'Poor Lizzie!'

'Sometimes when the thing comes back to my memory—the prison cell—the coming out again, which was worse; the miserable life that I have led in this hiding-place—I feel as if I must ask why? But the heavens are silent. One cannot be heard up there, because of the crowd who are all crying out together and asking why?—poor wretches! You know, when Abraham communed with the Lord it was in the desert alone under the clear sky. It is no use crying out among so many. Else I could lift up my voice and ask why I was born so weak and others so strong.' Here his face became suddenly contorted and his eyes glared and his body bent double and his hands clenched, and he swayed from side to side as one who is wrestling with an unseen adversary. Valentine sprang to her feet, but she could do nothing. You cannot help a man in mortal agony.

The attack was over in a few moments. Presently he lay back upon the bed pale and exhausted.

'It was the Devil,' he whispered. 'He always clutches at my heart when I think about James Carey. I thought he would have killed me that time.'

'Do not talk. Lie quite still and quiet. Shall I bring the Doctor to you?'

'No, no; it is over now. Give me that bottle. The Doctor can do nothing.'

She sat by the bedside and administered such words of consolation as came into her mind.

Then he sat up on the bed and began to tell her more about his life, and how, after a long period of misery and starvation, he found out the precarious way of earning his bread which he had practised ever since, and how the old life had vanished so completely that from the day when he was first put into prison he had never read a single book, nor looked in a single paper; and how, in the worst time of his trouble, his dream came to him and became a Ministering Angel; and he had found solace ever since in following an imaginary career of honour and distinction.

A thick black line indeed had been drawn across his life.

'What consolations,' he asked, 'can console for such a life as mine? There is the thought that sooner or later there will be an end of everything. "Surely," said the Preacher, "surely oppression maketh a man mad, and better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."'

As for the other form of consolation, which sometimes does console, the poor man had lost the power of feeling it.

'You must never again,' said Valentine, 'even think of this man. As he is dead you may the more readily forget him. And if you do not think of him too much, you may perhaps forgive him.'

'Forgive him!'

'As you hope for forgiveness yourself.'

'I do not hope for anything.'

'But he is dead.'

'I do not know yet whether I shall meet him after death. Do not speak of forgiveness.'

He fell asleep presently. It was long past midnight when Valentine went upstairs to her own room. Lotty was lying asleep; her pains

had left her for the moment; she was growing daily weaker; the moonlight was pouring into the room; from the neighbouring court there came the screams of an angry woman and the oaths of an angry man. Then these subsided and all was quiet. At one o'clock Valentine heard a step on the stair. It was Lizzie, the child of the gutter, come home from wandering about the streets. Valentine thought of her father's words. Should she be suffered to lie for ever in the gutter? Had she any womanly virtues? Well, the girl had one virtue: she loved her friends.

Lizzie passed into her room and closed the door.

Then Valentine leaned out of the open window and thought of the great Human Questions—why we are born—why we suffer—why we perish—and looked into the Silent Heavens above. In the clear sky rode the Queen of Night in splendour; some of the stars were visible; she seemed to hear millions of voices around her crying aloud in the night, all asking these questions, some with shrieks, and some with sighs, and some with wonder. And she longed for the peace of the desert

when, on such a night as that poor old man had reminded her, the Patriarch could step forth and commune with the Lord beneath the stars. Alas! the crowds of the great city would stifle such a commune at the very outset. Yet there are some—Valentine remembered—who find consolation in the faith that the heavens are not deaf as well as dumb. Else we had better all be dead, and let the great round world roll on for ever by itself without the mockery of man. And some day, we must also believe, all questions shall be answered, and on that day at length men shall learn even how to forgive themselves, and Shame and Remorse shall be no more.

CHAPTER XIV.

ASK ME NO MORE.

Ivy Lane, including the part now called Ivy Street, and the courts leading out of it, is estimated to contain 1,200 people, which gives, if you compute by the square mile, a most preposterous rate of population. Most of the evils of life have taken up a permanent abode there, or are efficiently represented. Poverty, for instance, is always there, but that is too common to be regarded as an evil any more than a bald head or grey hair; most people either suffer from it perennially, or get it from time to time. Destitution is always somewhere in the lane, with empty shelves and pinched faces; Disease is always somewhere; Drunkenness, as soon as the evening shades prevail, doth still take up its wondrous tale; Repentance in the form of headache and heartache is never absent from Ivy Lane, because the people are

always backsliding, and because, as the copy-books ought to enforce with greater emphasis, there is no overstepping which is not followed by its own headache; or as another Book hath it—'The way of transgressors is hard;' Injustice is always outside Ivy Lane, oppressing the helpless: cheating and knavery, falsehood and treachery, craft and subtlety, everything is in Ivy Lane. Here is always the young man choosing between the Broad and the Narrow Way; between the Easy Way and the Rough Way; generally he chooses the Broad Way and so gets presently into difficulties. There is the young girl with such a choice as Lizzie's always before her. There are the old men and women who feel in a blind confused kind of way that they must have made some great blunder at some time or other else they would not now be so horribly poor. Love is always there, the Love of wife and sweetheart and mother; Love in all its forms, strong to save. New life is always there: every minute, or thereabouts, a child is born. And Death is always there: once a week at least the black box, generally a little one, is carried down the Lane.

This hive of swarming life, as soon as

Valentine got over a few initial difficulties and grew accustomed to regard certain things without shrinking or terror, filled her with admiration mixed with humility. It shames us to witness the virtues of humble folk, because I suppose we are so perfectly certain that in our own case, supposing that we had ourselves to live in such a way, these virtues would be conspicuously absent. They are the humbler virtues, but useful and solid, such as Patience, Helpfulness, Cheerfulness, and Sympathy with other lives of little joy. By degrees Valentine got to know all the people. She talked with them in the streets, and sat with them in their rooms, and became, without difficulty and without money-giving, their friend. In every room there was a history. Thus, in one lay an old soldier, a Crimean veteran, full of stories, kept from starvation by a pension of ninepence a day, dying slowly of rheumatic gout, first engendered in the trenches before Sebastopol. There was the woman who washed, not as Mrs. Monument was wont to wash, with a lovely drying ground outside, but in her own room, hampered withal by a daughter of seventeen not quite right in her head—'half-baked,'

to use the popular and feeling expression. There was the decent man, laid up for the last four months with a bad knee, and all his savings gone. There was the painter who had always been in good work until his hand 'dropped'—a common misfortune in the trade when one grows elderly. There was the man whom rheumatism had seized by the fingers and the wrists, swelling his joints into huge lumps and twisting them out of shape so that he could not work. There were everywhere the women; here one down with a bad confinement; here one with a drunken husband who spent all the money in the 'Adelaide'; one whose husband was out of work; one whose husband had deserted her; and one whose husband was dead, and her children crying for the food which she could not give them. Another, an elderly single woman, gaunt and thin, proud and ashamed, held out against Valentine for a long time, with something of the decayed gentlewoman in her speech and manners, and no doubt a history of her own if she chose to tell it, but she kept it to herself. As for her work—such a woman is not born for such work—she had to make trousers with the help of a

machine for a delightful German firm whose daughter, though only seventeen, was told off on account of her supernatural hardness, her shrewish temper, and her fluent tongue, to bargain with the women and beat them down to the uttermost and rail at them. But yet, by reason of the beneficial law of Elevenpence-ha'penny, and despite the amiable young German, even this poor thing earned enough to keep the machine going. And everywhere a doleful and monotonous spectacle, the women and girls who toil all day with feverish energy for their miserable wage. Everywhere the life that is not life; the same slavery; the same oppression; and the same patience.

Of course these people are full of sin and steeped in wickedness; everybody says so; they are fond of drink and prejudiced against church, and avid of any little enjoyment which falls in their way; they are stiff-necked; ungrateful and never satisfied—considering that whatever is done for them they are always left with the same long hours and the same short pay, it is not wonderful that they should be discontented. All of them, moreover—a thing which must be considered—belong to the class which never

get any share at all in the fruit and the wine, the cakes and the ale, however hard they work; nay, the harder they work, the less they seem to get. And there are others, beside Sam the Socialist, who are loudly asking the ominous question if this is right, that any workers, even working girls who cannot combine and never complain, and are perfectly helpless and cannot kick, rebel, or demonstrate, and are under no law but the Law of Elevenpence-ha'penny, should always get less than their share.

'You take it too much to heart, Valentine,' said Claude.

They were sitting beside the pretty ornamental water in Victoria Park. It was half-past one o'clock, when the Victorians are all at dinner, and the Park was like the Garden of Eden, not only for its summer beauty, but because it contained only one single pair, a man and a woman. They had been talking over these things, and Valentine was betrayed into more emotion than was usual with her.

'I cannot take it too much to heart. It is impossible.' The tears crowded into her eyes, and her lips trembled. 'I hoped,' she added gently, but her tears rather than her words

reproached him, 'I hoped that you would have helped us, Claude.'

She was paler and thinner than when, six weeks before, she had begun her solitary life in Ivy Lane. Her face, always serious, was now set with a deeper earnestness, and there was no smile upon her lips. You have observed the first delicate beauty of a girl who knows nothing about the world and its wickedness, whose reading, as well as her companions, has been under supervision, who has been taught to believe in everybody's goodness, who has only just begun to go into society, and who is as yet perfectly heart-whole. Well, that was now gone.

In its place was the beauty of the girl who is young, still innocent, but no longer ignorant. Such knowledge as had come to Valentine does not destroy the early beauty, but it saddens the face and makes the eyes grave. She had learned hundreds of evil things; henceforth, things which had been mere phrases, prayers which had been meaningless, would possess for her their real and dreadful meaning.

There is nothing more saddening for a girl than the discovery that the world is not only

very wicked, which the most carefully shielded girl must learn some time or other, but that its wickedness, in every form, is about her and around her, at her very feet, and that she is in a sense already responsible for some of it. This knowledge of evil came to Valentine suddenly, not bit by bit and gradually, as ladies sometimes learn it, but in an overpowering cataract which was almost more than she could bear. Perhaps it would have been better, it would certainly have been easier for her, had she been kept from the knowledge. The cultured life, surrounded by hedges which are filled with rose bushes, hawthorn, eglantine, honeysuckle, and wild flowers on one side, but set with prickly pears and impenetrable thorns on the other, so as to exclude the rough and wicked world, is far more pleasant for a girl; most of us would keep our girls in this Paradise as long as we could; we think that because their frames are weaker and their limbs more delicate than our own, we ought to keep them even from knowing the wild forces and the ungoverned passions without, as if it was the body and not the soul that is threatened by those waves which break and those winds

which roar. Yet Lady Mildred knew beforehand something of what Valentine would experience. She did not act without deliberation: we are all, she thought, men and women alike; it cannot be altogether bad for us to know the truth about ourselves and our brothers. Some of us still remember the old story of how the knowledge of good and the knowledge of evil go together; and there are hundreds of women who all day long wade breast-high in moral sloughs and slums, and emerge unspotted, save that some of the sunshine is taken out of their faces, some of the light from their eyes, some of the smiles from their lips.

The tears in Valentine's eyes went straight to Claude's conscience like the stroke of a whip. This girl had not been his sister so long that he had ceased to regard her with a reverence which few brothers display towards their sisters. Besides, she was entrusted to his care; and, again, he had been thinking.

'I have not forgotten my promise, Valentine,' he said quickly; 'I remember all that you say to me. But it is a very serious subject.'

'You have really been thinking of us, Claude?'

'I have been reading as well as thinking.

But, Valentine, as yet I feel powerless even to suggest anything.'

'But you will never let it drop—never. Oh! Claude, I see Melenda every day.'

'There is no doubt,' he began, 'that working women are treated absolutely in accordance with the principle so dear to employers—supply and demand. If that is a true principle, then I suppose they ought to have nothing to complain of.'

'Nothing to complain of!'

'Supply and demand means that women have got to take the best terms they can get; in the struggle to live they undersell each other till they reach the lowest terms on which life can be supported. That is the whole case, Valentine. The employer gives the lowest wages which will be taken. There is no question of justice, or of kindness, or of mercy. They call it a law of political economy, which must be obeyed.'

'Is it also a law of political economy that men who employ the women are to get rich? Who makes such laws? I suppose the manufacturers. Let us make our own laws for the women, and the first law of all, that whether

the employer gets his profit or not, the girls shall be properly paid.'

'We should then promptly lose the services of the employer.'

'Then we would do without him.'

'Women cannot combine like men. They are unaccustomed to act together. There are too many of them. And they have no public spirit.'

'I have heard all this before, Claude. But first set up all your difficulties, and then you can cut your way through them.'

'They could perhaps combine,' Claude went on, 'if they had the support of the men. How to get that? How to make the working man feel that he must look after his sister?'

'You will teach him that, Claude.'

'You are persistent, Valentine. Every day your eyes look at me reproachfully——'

'I do not mean to be reproachful.'

'And yet you are reproachful. And every day the burden you would lay upon me grows heavier to look upon.'

'Then take it up, Claude, and every day it will grow lighter.'

'One must move the girls to act together;

one must move the working man to act for his sister; and one must move the ladies, the gentlewomen, to act for the women who work. You demand impossibilities, Valentine.'

'Only a man can move the women. You must speak to them, Claude. You must speak right out—from your very heart.'

'It is strange,' he went on, pursuing his own thoughts without answering her, 'it is strange. The oppression of the working woman is no new thing. It has not been discovered yesterday or the day before. It has been preached and described over and over again. Never a year passes but some one writes indignantly about their treatment. It is fifty years since Hood's "Song of the Shirt" was written, and forty since Mrs. Browning's "Cry of the Children." Well, the children have long since been released, and yet the women remain in their misery.'

'That is because we care for the children,' said Valentine, 'but we do not care for each other.'

'There are no women anywhere,' Claude went on, 'so charitable and so generous as Englishwomen; they are never tired of doing

good things, they sacrifice themselves, they go about among the poor, they are nurses.'

'But oh!' Valentine interrupted him, 'how many thousands are there like me, who have never done anything but look for new pleasures!'

'There is a great literature upon the subject; the lines are written in blood, yet no man regardeth it. The story of the needlewoman of London is so terrible that one wonders why Crusades have not been preached. As for that, a Crusade has been preached, but nothing comes of it.'

'It is because the preachers are women, and no one will listen to them. They want a man to preach, Claude; they want you.'

'They want a stronger man than me.'

'I can teach you what we women are like. I have studied myself on purpose. We are soft and luxurious; we like things to be smooth and pleasant; we never ask how things come; we think the world was made only for us to enjoy; we hate to hear painful stories; we put ugly things out of sight. You must force us to hear the whole truth: don't talk about our kind hearts; lash us with the truth about our

hardness till we cry for shame and repentance.'

She looked as if she herself could preach such a sermon on such a text.

'You are too bitter, Valentine.'

'We want a man,' she repeated, 'who must be young and generous; he must be full of anger; he must be able to speak, and fearless; he must be a man who can speak to women of any class; he should be a scholar; he should know the working women well; he should be bound to them, Claude, by more than the ordinary ties. Oh! where can such a man be found unless it is yourself? Claude, it is your sister Melenda who calls you out of her misery and her helplessness. Listen! Oh! you *must* hear her voice among them all—it is so full of rage and of madness. For what good were you taken from among them if—you—you of all men—spend your powers and your knowledge for your own ambition? Oh! Claude, if you could see the girls in their pain, too wretched even to pray'—she stopped because her voice broke down. 'Claude, forgive me. I will never trouble you again. You have your own ambition; you have chosen your own way; and

all I can do is to stay among them and help one or two.'

She had conquered him before, when she made him help her in the Great Renunciation by her music. She conquered him now by her tears. He took her hand and inclined his head over it saying, 'Take me, Valentine; do with me what you please. I am altogether at your service.'

'Claude!' she dashed away her tears and sprang to her feet. 'You mean all that you say—exactly—all that you say?'

'All, Valentine. Why, my honour is concerned; it is my sister who calls me. Which of my sisters? Is it Melenda, or is it Polly-which-is-Marla?'

She caught his hands and held them with sparkling eyes.

'Only,' he said, 'do not expect too much. I told you at the beginning that you would be disappointed in me.'

'No, never disappointed; always proud of our brother. And now, Claude, now—oh! the women have never—never had such a chance before. You will feel for these poor girls as no one else but yourself could feel for them. It is

like taking one of themselves out of the dreadful work-rooms and giving her voice and speech and knowledge. Do you think that my mother —that Lady Mildred—meant this all along? Do you think she designed from the beginning that you were to give to the people the things she gave to you? Why, it was like a woman —was it not?—to give them through a man. But what did she intend for Polly?' Certainly, she remembered in time, Polly showed, as yet, no signs of giving back anything to her own people. Valentine ceased, therefore, to pursue this speculation, which might have carried her farther than she wished. 'Oh, happy girls!' she went on, 'they have found a Leader at last. You will speak for them, Claude, and write for them, and think for them. Oh, to be a man and to have a great cause to fight for! And you dared—oh! you poor boy, only a month ago—you dared to hesitate between your ambition and this wonderful Career that lies before you. Oh, it fills me with such joy! I cannot tell you how happy it makes me,' yet she was crying. 'I have been wretched because of my own helplessness. But now you are with me all the difficulties will vanish.'

'As for me I feel that the difficulties are only just beginning. You will help me to face them.'

'Yes; I will help you if I can. I did not understand at first, but now I do, that this is a work which will take all your soul and all your strength, Claude; all your time—perhaps all your life. Will you give so much to your poor sisters, who will take it all and perhaps never thank you? All your life, Claude? All your life—and never to regret or to look back?'

'It is all I have to give, Valentine. I am prepared to give so much. Even to give up'—he blushed and laughed—'even to give up the Woolsack, and never become Lord Chancellor.'

She did not comprehend—no woman could comprehend—the full extent of Claude's sacrifice. Many young men are ardently desirous of distinction or even notoriety; they will stoop to Tomfool tricks if they cannot get a show by any other way. Claude, on the other hand, was possessed of the idea that he ought to justify his social promotion. It seems, if you think of it, an extremely foolish thing for a young man to be picked out and raised above his fellows if he does nothing afterwards to

justify the selection. One such case have I known. The man had everything in his favour; that is to say, he was, to begin with, the son of a village blacksmith, which is an enormous advantage at the outset. You cannot get much nearer to the hard pan. Then he was a strong and lusty creature; and he was much impressed, like Claude, with the necessity for work. He did work; he worked day and night; yet, most unhappily. He was awkward and stupid, and could never acquire either knowledge or manners. He experienced as much difficulty in passing his examinations as if he had been the Son of a Duke; he entered a profession where brains are welcomed but are not necessary; and he has remained ever since in the lower branch of that profession on the wages of a blacksmith's assistant.

Consider: Claude had his fellowship; that is to say, a certain income for a few years longer; he could afford to wait; he had already some work, and could very fairly expect more; he could speak; he had studied Law with the same intensity which he threw into all his work; and he was calmly certain that he was going to do well. There is one excellent thing

about a good degree, that it makes a young man believe in himself. He who has been well up in the First Class never afterwards doubts his own capacity to become Lord Chancellor, Archbishop of Canterbury, Editor of the *Times*, Poet Laureate, President of the College of Physicians, Prime Minister,—anything except Ambassador. That is the one distinction which shares with the Garter the pride of being kept absolutely out of anybody's reach. These First Class men do not generally aspire after the fame of Thackeray or Fielding, because, in Academic Groves, the craft of the novelist is held in contempt, and is not yet even recognised as one of the Fine Arts. They do not read Lucian, Apuleius, and Heliodorus. Claude therefore, who had been very near to the top, regarded any of these positions as a young athlete may regard an Alpine Peak. His foot may yet stand upon it. If now, at the very outset and beginning, he was to withdraw in order to work for Valentine, it would most likely be to destroy everything; and for what?

'What will you give me, Valentine, in exchange for the Woolsack?'

She was *exaltée* at the prospect which she

saw before her, fair and glorious, because she was still very young, and because she believed greatly in this young man, who might have been, and thought he was, her brother.

'Oh!' she said, 'you want nothing. It is a nobler life that you have chosen. It is a far greater thing even to try, and though you fail altogether; but you shall not fail, Claude; you shall not fail. I said that your sisters will take all that you give, and never perhaps thank you. But I will take care that they shall. And in exchange you shall have the hearts of a hundred thousand women, whose lot you will change from wretchedness to plenty. Will not that be compensation enough for you?'

When history comes to ask—as no doubt it will—how it happened that so excellent a Lord Chancellor as Claude Monument was lost to the country, and why he never became Sir Claude Monument, and then Baron Monument, and then Earl of Hackney Marsh, I hope this chapter will be considered a sufficient reply. No one is to be blamed, except himself, and we must not blame him greatly, because he was like his forefather when the woman tempted him, and he fell.

CHAPTER XV.

BROTHER JOE'S DISCOVERY.

CLAUDE'S conversion, or his awakening, or his act of crowning folly, whichever you please to call it, by which he absolutely abandoned and threw away as promising a career as ever offered itself to an ambitious young man, took place on the morning of Saturday, the twenty-ninth day of August.

The date is as important as other historical dates. It marks the commencement of a new era, as will be presently seen, and it has, therefore, to be remembered like that of the Hegira, or that of Martin Luther's 'Theses.' It is also extremely important for another reason of a more private nature, and therefore, because all of us love the individual above the class, of more general interest. It is that on the very day after his conversion Claude learned a very important family secret. If he had known it

on the Saturday morning his decision might possibly have been the same, but there would have been hesitations and difficulties.

He found out this important fact in a very simple way, so simple that he wondered afterwards why he had not thought of that way before. But then he had never set himself to discover a secret which Lady Mildred evidently regarded as her own, nor had he ever thought of ways by which that secret could be discovered. That kind of smallmindedness is impossible for a man whose chief desire it is to justify his promotion.

On the Sunday morning, being the day after the Great Surrender, he called upon his mother. This was not in itself by any means an extraordinary event or one calling for observation. And his mother talked a great deal about her daughter, which was also not extraordinary, because during that summer the old lady thought and talked of little else, and occupied the whole time, during every one of Claude's visits, in a running commentary on the virtues of her daughter Polly. Claude, she thought, should consider his sister more; he should take her to tea sometimes, say at the

Spaniards, or Jack Straw's Castle, or North End, or High Beech, or Chingford, or to some other country place of a Sunday; she would be all the better for country air, and she was too proud to keep company with the first that offered; as for thoughtfulness, and good temper, and singing like a bird, and never being cross, and catching a person up, or getting into rages, as Melenda did, there was nobody in the world like Polly, and what she should do when Polly went back to her place in October she did not know.

While they were still talking about her, it happened—again not an unusual thing on Sunday morning—that Joe came slowly down the road and looked in at the almshouse, and stood at the door, leaning and listening, pipe in mouth, slowly getting, in his own way, the utmost possible enjoyment out of a fine Sunday. He never said much at any time, chiefly because he was of an amiable disposition, and loved to oblige and gratify other people, and very well knew that people liked talking better than listening, and that everybody had a great deal to say on every subject. This morning he said nothing at all, but from time to time there

passed over his face something broader than a smile, and something narrower than a grin. On Sundays he was newly shaven, so that the play of his lips had a chance, and his face, which during the week was always smudged, was now clean, so that his eyes had a chance. His lips, while his mother talked of Polly, smiled from time to time, and his eyes danced, if a man of Joe's age can have dancing eyes. Claude observed these signs of amused intelligence, and wondered what they might mean. Presently, and soon after stroke of noon, Joe got up to go, and Claude accompanied him. They walked away together, side by side, workman and gentleman, as it should be with all workmen and all gentlemen, as well as with those who are brothers. Outside the almshouses, Joe knocked the ashes from his pipe and laughed, not aloud, but with a chuckling, bubbling, secret enjoyment.

'What are you grinning at, Joe?' asked Claude, 'and what made you keep smiling while my mother talked?'

'She goes on about the gell, don't she, boy? Never tired of singin' her praises—might make a man jealous, because there's my Rhoder

been with her as many years as that one weeks.'

'She is very fond of her.'

'Well, I ain't jealous. Not a bit, Claude. I like to hear her. It does me good to hear her go on like that, the poor old woman! It makes her happy, don't it?'

'Why shouldn't she go on as you call it?'

'She and her Polly! Ho! ho! ho!'

'What do you mean, Joe?'

Joe stopped and looked at his brother in questioning guise.

'Why, you don't mean to tell me that you haven't found out?'

'Found out—what?'

'It don't matter to you and me; and if the old woman likes to think she's Polly, and if it makes 'em both happy, what's the odds to anybody?'

'Well, but, Joe—what can you know about it?'

Joe laughed.

'As if I shouldn't know my own sister direckly I set eyes upon her.'

'How should you know her when you haven't seen her for twenty years?'

'Brigadier, you're a scholar, and you've read a mighty lot of books. I haven't. But I'm blessed if I don't think I am as sharp in most things as you.'

'Sharper, if you please, Joe. I am sure you are, in fact. But go on, please.'

'Why—carn't you guess now? Look here, Lootenant, it's this way. When father died—you've got no call to be ashamed of your father, mind—I was sixteen years old. Consequentially, I remember him, and his face too, very well, I do. You were only three or four. Consequentially you carn't remember him nor his face. And he hasn't left his likeness behind. There's never a photograph of him anywheres. Now do you begin to see?'

Claude had not begun even yet to see. He had never somehow connected his father, who was the Shadow of a Name—but a blameless Name—with these two girls.

'When I see the two young ladies, pretty and sweet-mannered like the flowers in the Garden, and when I heard them going on in that pretty way of theirs about Valentine and Violet, and Miss Beatrice and Polly, and not knowing which was which, and the old woman

clutching hold of the one that wasn't Polly, and then the one that was, I could ha' laughed right out. But I didn't, Claude, I just let things be, and sat as grave as a judge.'

'Well, Joe?'

'Well? And didn't you see me call Rhoder and range her up alongside the two young ladies? What do you think I did that for? Why, for you to see as well as me, of course. I said to myself, "Claude's got eyes in his head. It's easy for him to see which of them two young ladies my gell favours." There she was—there was my Rhoder alongside the two who don't know which is which. Why, to me the likeness was just wonderful. It was most enough for a blind man to see.'

'Yet I saw nothing.'

'That was because you didn't think about anything but them two pretty creatures. Your head was full of 'em. As for my Rhoder, you hadn't a thought for her. Now look here, Claude, Rhoder's a very pretty gell—as pretty as most, and what's more to the point, she's just exactly like your father must ha' been when he was sixteen—as much as one sweet-pea is like another—though her grandfather couldn't

exactly be called a sweet-pea. Cast your eye on Rhoder and you'll see your father over again. Then think of the two young ladies.'

Claude changed colour. He began to understand now.

'Get on a little faster, Joe—do get on. Tell me everything.'

'Father, you see,'—Joe did get on, but slowly—'he'd got a delicate kind of face, with what the women call speaking eyes, and a soft sort of a smiling mouth—oh! he was a good-looking chap; if you were old enough to remember what he was like, you wouldn't forget him in a hurry. Looked like a gentleman, he did. Well now, here's the long and short of it. Rhoder has got the same eyes and the same delicate sort of a face, and the young lady she calls Polly hasn't.'

'Oh!'

'But the other one has. That very same identical face and eyes she's got. Same as my Rhoder. That's why I put her up alongside for you to see. And now do you understand?'

There was no longer any room for doubt on the point. The most stupid would have understood.

'Is it possible? Are you quite sure of what you say, Joe?'

'Certain sure I am. Lord! when I see that one coming back again without her fallals and pretending she was Polly come to look after her mother, I could ha' laughed again. But I didn't laugh, Claude, because mother took it mighty serious.'

'Joe, she does not know. Valentine really does not know.'

'That's what I was in trouble about. I said, Either she's acting, or she isn't. If she is acting, it's the best acting I ever see, and it would be a shame to spoil the fun; and if she isn't, she's a good girl, and it would be a shame to tell her when she think's she's doing her best by her mother and Melenda.'

'This is no acting, Joe. Valentine does not know anything, and she must not be told.'

'Besides,' Joe continued, 'it isn't every young lady who would come and live as she's living. Not but what she's safe enough; and Melenda, though she's set her back up, wouldn't let anybody insult her but herself. I found that out first thing, Claude.'

'Did you, Joe?' Claude was much touched

with this act of forethought. It really was a good thing for Joe to have done, if you come to think about it.

'Lady Mildred's daughter must not be let come to no harm,' Joe replied. 'If it hadn't been for her, where should we all be now? So, Claude, I had a word or two with Melenda. And she knows what to do.'

'Don't tell my mother, Joe. Let her find out when the time comes. Perhaps she may never find out.'

'I won't tell, boy. Don't be afraid of me, Captain.'

'And I say, Joe, don't be offended, you know, but I hope you haven't told Rhoda or —or anybody at home.'

'Tell Rhoder? Ho, ho! Claude, *do* you think I was born yesterday? You might as well tell the parish pump. I've told nobody except you. Me and you know—that's enough. Polly is the other one—the one who looked out of the corners of her eyes at me—thought I was going to knock her down, p'raps, or say something rude, or go swearing at the ladies; or to jump upon her, very likely; wondered if a working man was tame, and looked round

the almshouses as if she was half ashamed and half curious and half amused. That one is your sister, Claude. That's Polly-which-is Marla.'

Claude began to consider rapidly the situation and its possibilities. If Valentine knew this, or was to find it out, the whole reasons for her retreat from the world would be lost, and she might as well go back again. Then the brotherly relation with himself would be at an end; he could no longer go on working with her in the same free and unrestrained manner. Why—he thought—what could be the reason for allowing Valentine to be under his care unless the maintenance of that brotherly sentiment, so that there should be no room for any other when the Discovery had to be made? It was wise and thoughtful of Lady Mildred, who was always wise and thoughtful. They were always to remain brother and sister. Very well, it was strange to feel that they never could be brother and sister. Meantime, in loyalty to his benefactor and friend, the situation must be accepted now at the cost of some deception and dissembling.

'Is it possible?' he said a second time.

'As for this one,' Joe went on, 'that you

call Valentine and mother calls Polly, she must be Miss Beatrice, I s'pose, and Lady Mildred's daughter. But, bless you, she isn't a bit proud. She sings about the place like a lark, and does up the tea-things, and dusts the room, and makes the old woman laugh, and fixes her easy and comfortable; and then she comes up to our place and sits down friendly and talks to the missus; and she's as good as a mother to Rhoder—who's afraid of her—and she buys things for the kids—boots and fruit and toys and things. She's a topper, Claude. That's what she is, and don't let's make no error about that. But you trust me. I won't tell. As for letting anybody know—why—there——'

He filled his pipe again and began to feel for his box of matches.

'You remember my father well?' asked Claude.

Joe's face changed curiously, and again Claude wondered. For this time it changed from sunshine to cloud, and his eyes darkened.

'Yes,' he replied shortly, 'I remember him very well.'

'It is curious,' said Claude, 'that I seem to know so little about him.'

'Well, Claude, there isn't much to know, perhaps. He's dead. That's about the sum of it. When a man's dead, there isn't much to say about him generally, is there? Once a man's dead, you see—why—he's dead, ain't he?'

'How was it he looked like a gentleman?'

'Can't say,' Joe replied, ''cause he never told me.'

'A locksmith doesn't often look like a gentleman.'

'Well, I'm a plumber and a locksmith, and a house decorator, and anything you please. And I suppose I don't look very much like a gentleman, if you come to that. Unless it's on Sunday morning, when I've got on my Sunday trousers and in clean shirt sleeves, and I'm a-carrying home the beer for dinner, and then I feel a gentleman down to the ground. But you always look like one, Claude. There's no doubt about you. So did father, though not such an out-and-out Toff as you, Captain.'

'I should like to remember him.'

'Should you?' Joe replied, with a strange light in his eyes. 'Well, Claude, you've got no call to be ashamed of your father—remem-

ber that—though he was but a locksmith. Honest he was, and truthful—specially truthful. That's enough said about father. And don't you never talk to your mother about him, because she don't like it. Widows don't mostly, I suppose, like talkin' about their husbands. Seems natural, somehow.'

As a general proposition this maxim may be disputed, but in his own mother's case, Joe was right. Mrs. Monument did not like talking about her late husband.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EARTHLY TRACT SOCIETY.

In this informal way, merely by conversation on a bench in Victoria Park, was formed a Partnership which has already accomplished so considerable a work. It seems, now that we can look back from the vantage ground of a few months' history, a natural result of Valentine's Great Renunciation and Claude's Great Surrender. And although the thing is spreading far and wide, it must not be forgotten that it was originally intended for the most obscure and the least known quarter of London, a place quite hidden away and forgotten, concerning which nothing has ever been written, and for which nothing worthy of the chronicler has ever been attempted. Who could look for great things out of Hoxton? In that respect it may compare with a certain little city of Galilee.

The complete history of this Partenership will doubtless be some day written in detail. It is nothing less than a chapter in Political Economy, and belongs to that important section of the science which shows how tendencies have been mistaken for laws; how selfishness, avarice, greed, knavery, cheatery, and injustice have been considered the great and beneficent purpose of Creation, and tricks of Trade have been taken as forming part of the Eternal Reign of Law.

It is, in fact, the story how the supposed Laws of Humanity may be modified by simple acts of Humanity. This, if they were indeed laws, is exactly as if the Laws of Gravitation could be suspended or reversed by a simple effort of the human will. And as the ideas of the Partnership are spreading, and have already got outside Ivy Lane and have invaded Clinger Street, Hemsworth Road, Bacchus Walk, and James Street, and are now crossing the Kingsland Road into Haggerston, and have leaped across the canal into Islington and Dalston, and are stirring the sluggish blood of Goswell Road, it is only just to Valentine that the truth about the beginning of the New Gospel—after all

only a natural outcome of the old—should be clearly stated.

Great ideas grow quickly in the brains where they are first inspired, especially if they are assisted by a Partnership of the only true kind—namely, a male and female partnership; for the masculine mind at its best is as prolific of ideas as a sunflower is of seeds or an oak of acorns. It puts them forth freely and without stint, while the feminine mind receives such of them as it catches, and nurses them tenderly while they are yet young, watching them grow, placing them in the sunshine, keeping them from East winds until they are able to go alone and need her care no longer. There have been Partnerships where the reverse process has been attempted, but purely feminine ideas have proved to be weakly sickly things, and man is never a good nurse. It does not do to fly in the face of nature. Some day there will be some such partnerships as this in Art, and especially in the Art of Fiction, whereby for the first time the true woman may be revealed to the admiring man, and the true man to the admiring woman. As yet it has been given unto us only partially to discern the working

of the feminine mind, and to understand darkly that it works on lines wholly different from our own. There are so many great ideas—just as there are so many acorns—that by this time there should be nothing left in the way of Human endeavour to discover or to do. Unfortunately, just as there are so many acorns which never come to oaks, so there are so many great ideas which perish in the very inception or first beginning of them. Some are gobbled up by the pigs—those, namely, which are too generous for contemporary mankind; some fall on rocks—those, namely, which are in advance of their generation; some in ditches where they are choked by weeds—those be they which are uttered in humble and lowly place; some fall among the crowd, which is busy in buying and selling, and so heed them not, but trample them under foot; and some fall into running streams and are carried out into rivers and so into the Ocean and are lost—these are ideas which are proclaimed at the wrong time, as when, during a time of war, a man shall go about preaching peace. The loss of all these ideas is a dreadful hindrance to progress. Another is the inconceivable stupidity of that blind, deaf-and-dumb

race known as the 'Other People.' What a world—what a wonderful and beautiful world—could we create in a year or two but for the Other People! All the wars, all the injustices, all the blunders, and all the crimes are due to the Other People. But for them we should unite, combine, agree, concert, devise, and execute such things as the world has never yet seen. It is for this long-eared race that statesmen make pledges, promises, and assurances; they have eyes which see not and ears which hear not; they are idolaters, and worship one man, one formula, one idea; and for stiff-neckedness, for continual lusting after things which they ought not to desire, they are worse than the Israelites in their most palmy days.

'What next, Claude?'

'What next, indeed! What first?'

'To begin with then, I know quantities of people in Ivy Lane. I can ask questions without giving offence. They are all friendly with me, and they don't think that I am working for them.'

'I suppose nobody likes being worked for,' said Claude. 'Suppose the working man were to form a society for the reformation of higher-

class manners. It would be irritating to know that hundreds of men and women were going about in the West End trying to raise one—the Low Level one—to a higher level. How would you like it, Valentine, if you knew that worthy people were wearing blue ribbons solely in order to make you temperate? How should you like to be invited to tea and addresses for your moral good?'

'I should be very angry.'

'So I dare say will your friends in Ivy Lane become if we let them suspect that we are working for them. Patience, Valentine, and let us get the facts.'

'It is in my favour,' she said, 'that I do not belong to any of the well-known organisations of parish religious societies—Church or Chapel. People do not suspect me of wanting them to do something or believe something, since I neither wear a monastic dress nor belong to the religious missions. I am not expected to rebuke nor to admonish, which makes a great difference.'

She might also have explained that there were certain graces of manner peculiar to her which greatly assisted her and softened the

hearts of the people and would not permit them to be brutal.

There stands a little chapel in Ivy Lane, of which mention has already been made. It is quite a modest little structure, yet proud, and justly proud, of the purity with which the Christian doctrines have always been proclaimed here to the people by faithful ministers who have never felt the least need of worldly learning. It is complete though so small; there is a gallery in it; one window with a circular head at the back and two in front. There is also a harmonium, and there is a table on which a desk stands and does duty for a pulpit on Sundays. It holds at least forty people without counting the gallery. One of the first things the Partners did was to engage this chapel for week-day services of a different kind. Here Valentine placed a piano, and invited all the ladies of Ivy Lane to come and to bring their babies, on certain evenings, when she gave them tea, and sang to them; and sometimes the Doctor, who had a manly bass, sang too, or gave recitations; and sometimes Claude read. The women came first, because it was a new thing and pleasant; then some of them got

tired of the singing and the reading, and wanted the perfect freedom of their own tongues, and returned to the open court again. But some there were—there is always a leaven—who preferred the peace and the good behaviour in this chapel to the noise outside. It was from these quiet women that Valentine gathered, bit by bit, the real life of the poor. You may talk to such people for hours together without hearing anything at all, and then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, and perhaps from the most stupid person in the world, you will get a single hint, a fact, a suggestion, which makes your heart leap up because it explains a thousand things, and shows the way clear and certain where it was formerly hidden by the bushes.

Very well; anybody can hire a hall and play and sing to people. The Kyrle Society are always doing it, with admirable results. That is to say, the people are pleased, and go away, and are not in the smallest degree stimulated to learn singing and playing for themselves. If this is all the Partnership and the Great Renunciation and the Surrender has been able to effect, Valentine might as well have

remained among her own friends and merely married an Earl or a Viscount, and Claude might as well have stayed where he was and merely become in course of time Lord Chancellor. But there are other things, though some of them belong to a later period, after her first three months of exile were finished, and she had gone home and returned again. Besides, it is in the nature of every healthy human thing to grow and of every truly spiritual thing to grow without knowing the decay which presently falls upon things of the flesh. The purpose which began with nothing more than the study of three working girls, widened until it covered the whole wide and terrible subject of women's wrongs; when Valentine called for the assistance of Claude it was in the hope of redressing some of those wrongs. But man's intellect tends to roam and woman's to concentrate; and, as the former is the stronger, so Purpose grows.

'Don't you think, Claude,' said Valentine one day, 'don't you think that a person even in these days may get a Revelation—that is, a perfectly true idea?'

'Why not? Every true thing is a Revela-

tion, I suppose. You have a new thing in your own mind?'

'Is it new? It is this—if everybody knew all that science can teach, there would be no suffering or disease, would there?'

'No, I suppose not, if science could learn new things as fast as they could teach them to the people.'

'And if they knew everything in morals there would be no wicked men, would there?'

'The only original sin is ignorance. Your idea is not quite new, yet it is new enough for us. Go on, Valentine.'

'It is new to me.'

'Huxley has compared life to a game of chess with an invisible opponent who knows every move of the game, and takes advantage of his knowledge. If you make a false move he crushes you without the least remorse.'

'I did not mean anything quite so grand as that. I meant something much simpler. Such as that people ought to be clean and to keep their houses clean; they ought to take care of their own health; they ought to be temperate and thrifty; they ought to get fresh air; they ought to practise self-control——'

'All this is perfectly true. But——'

'Wait a little, Claude. I cannot put things quite like Professor Huxley. They have been told, I suppose, that they ought to do all these things. But then they have not been told why. Do you think if they knew the reasons for obeying that they would go on disobeying laws?'

'You have not said all that is in your mind, Valentine.'

'Not quite. If you told me not to go across a field but round its sides I might obey or I might not. If you proved to me that I must not cross the field because there was a great shaking quagmire in the middle which would swallow me up, I should certainly not cross the field.'

'I begin to perceive, my Partner, that you have got hold of a practical idea.'

'It came of something you said the other day, Claude,' she said, blushing with the pleasure of having really thought of something.

'Of course. Adam once laid all the blame on Eve, and she has been giving him all the praise ever since.'

'Well—perhaps—I do not know—things may be so connected that it would be easier to

move the men in the right direction if we first endeavoured to make them more careful about their homes.'

'You connect the women with the home, of course.'

'Do you really think my idea, though it may not be at all new, may be worth considering? Should we begin by teaching people something? Oh! we are getting on so slowly.'

'Do not be despondent, Valentine. We shall get on slowly though we give all our lives to the task. We have got to accomplish something well-nigh impossible. We have got to find out if anything can possibly be done to improve the condition of our friends. As for that quagmire illustration of yours it is almost as good as the chess comparison. But who is to make the people understand it?'

'You, Claude, of course.'

Claude laughed. 'Of course I can do everything. Well, I obey. The real Augean stable, I am quite sure, was Ivy Lane, and the river which was turned into it was the Regent's Canal. It was, in those days, called the River of Knowledge.'

It was from this conversation that the great

Earthly Tract Association first had its origin. Attempts have been made, I know, to connect the foundation of this most remarkable Society with other people, and many go about professing themselves to have been the Founders. But the real Founder was none other than Valentine ; the first members were only herself and Claude ; they began with the expenditure of half-a-sovereign and the printing of a single tract, which Valentine gave to her friends, the women of Ivy Lane ; they wrote all the earlier tracts themselves, though it was very early in their history that the Doctor joined them. Little by little more tracts were written and distributed ; then they began to re-write the first tracts, which naturally attempted too much, and they recast their original design. How the thing grew and extended itself in all directions ; how people from Manchester and Birmingham and Bradford, where they are always open to ideas, heard of these tracts, and sent for them, and for more ; how the tracts began to be spoken about ; how wealthy people gave them money, and the sale of the tracts brought in more money, and how they were obliged to have an office and to take in clerks,

and how that office is spreading into a great warehouse, and the tracts are being translated into all languages, and how it will very shortly become a vast building on the Thames Embankment—all this is history which has to be written in the immediate future when the Earthly Tract Society shall have done its work and scattered knowledge over the whole world, as the late Professor Holloway scattered his advertisements, and shall have taught people in simple language the Conduct of Life. 'If,' said the original Prospectus of the Society, 'people had taken as much pains to spread the knowledge of things in general as they have taken to spread the knowledge of one form of the Christian Faith—which they might have done, and not left the other undone—the general ignorance would be by this time as good as gone; it would have been swept away as by a mop and a bucket.'

'The whole of the English-speaking world—that is to say, the educated and the uneducated—clearly understand the Christian creed as it is expounded by the Evangelical Party; and this, not because the people all go to church, which they do not, nor because they

read books, for they never read any book; nor because these things are presented to them in the papers, which is not the case, for the papers preserve silence on these subjects; nor is it due to their home influences, which make more for the derision of all religions than for the defining of any particular form; nor to their schools, because catechisms are no longer taught in them; but wholly, solely, and entirely to the dissemination of Tracts. Would you, therefore'—one is still quoting from the Prospectus—'make the people wise in the Conduct of Life? Write Tracts, give them simple rules of life and the reasons for them. Then distribute these Tracts broadcast among the people, from street to street and from house to house—keep on distributing Tracts. Prepare a Tract, or a series of Tracts, for every virtue and for every vice, setting forth as faithfully as the Religious Tracts have done for many years, the true Doctrine and the consequence of violating its laws.'

'The first thing,' said Claude, while this Prospectus was under consideration, 'is to write the Tracts.'

'That of course, Claude, you will do.'

'Of course, Valentine, I am an encyclopædia.'

'You can consult an encyclopædia. Let us begin at once.'

'We will form ourselves,' said Claude, 'into an Association. You shall be the President, I will be the Secretary; we will call ourselves the Earthly Tract Society, to distinguish ourselves from the older Association, which has never attempted the improvement of the world in comfort, culture, and manners. I think the name sounds well and will carry weight. And now, Valentine, let us begin to set down some of the Tracts we shall want and to give them their titles.'

Let no one think it an easy matter to write a tract. Many of the earlier ones, for instance, those that were first issued, proved quite useless, because they were pitched a note too high or a note too low. A Tract must have a definite thing to say, and it must say that thing with great vigour and plainness, and without the least chance of mistake; the propositions laid down must be, if possible, those which are not capable of denial; and they must be stated with attractiveness. No Tract, for instance, must contain a theory or anything which may be argued against. Every Tract must also be

short; and perhaps it is as well that there should be half a dozen Tracts on the same subject; it is well, also, that the Tract should be signed, because people like a man who is not afraid to advance his opinions. Sometimes a dialogue may prove the most useful way of presenting the subject—Sometimes a fable, sometimes a story, sometimes a piece of history; in fact there is no form of literature which may not be pressed into the service of the Earthly Tract Association, except Satire. This would be a perfectly useless weapon when employed against the habits of the working classes. One might as well address them in Greek or Hebrew.

The most successful of the early series were, I think, all written by the Partnership, and among them, especially, were the Domestic series. It began with the Tract on Wives, meaning the right Treatment of a Wife, with her husband's plain duties towards her; the corresponding Paper on Husbands; on Children, with a Parent's duty to his offspring; on Language, the word used in its popular sense, and with special reference to the use of the Universal Adjective; on the House; on Woman's

clothes; on Dinners; on clean Streets; on Water; on Fresh Air; on Amusements; on Holidays; on Beer; on Pretty Things; on Dressing the Hair; on Boots; on Wages, high and low; in the last-named tract the working men are first approached, but with great delicacy, on the subject of permitting their girls to take less wages than will keep a girl strong and healthy; on Hours of Work; and so on. When the Doctor became associated with them he contributed the well-known Tracts on certain forms of disease, and how they may be prevented; on certain elementary principles of Physiology; on Food, and what should be eaten; on Exercise; on Tobacco; and many others. It was later that the Series of Tracts appeared which dealt with the duties and privileges of an English subject; it was from these papers that the English workman learned for the first time, with considerable astonishment, what neither his school nor his newspaper had taught him, the prodigious extent and wonderful history of his own country, how it grew, and how it must be preserved and developed, his own inheritance in the world and what it means to be an Englishman. The

latest Tracts of all are those on the Co-operation of men and women, and if these tracts are to bring about the Doctor's Universal League of Labour, it will be interesting to watch that body and to consider its ways. One need hardly stop to notice the very remarkable effect of the Tracts upon Ivy Lane, because they are already well known, and the place has now become a Show Street. The houses are as beautifully clean as a Dutch village, the blinds are white, the little chapel has become a Concert and Dancing-room, the Adelaide Tavern is the Street club; there are flowers in every window, and these are clean; within, the floors are scrubbed, walls are dusted, water is filtered; the men have quite left off getting drunk; they never swear unless the situation demands strong and plain words; they do not beat their wives; the women do not scream and fly into rages; quarrelling among them is almost unknown; all alike have grown critical over their meat, their beer, their tea, their coffee, their bread, and their dress; every family saves something every week; and the Universal Adjective has quite fallen into contempt, though, I confess, it may still be heard in other parts of London.

More important still is the growth and development of the institution founded to run side by side with the Earthly Tract Society, that of the Street Committees. Every street has now its own committee, elected by the inhabitants. Up to the present time their functions have been almost entirely sanitary; but they are gradually invading the region of morals, and they are already the terror of the dustman and the dread of the vestry, and the cause why landlords blaspheme. Besides, other streets have followed the example of Ivy Lane. There is, as mentioned above, a Movement in Clinger Street; there is a shaking in Myrtle Row, and Bacchus Walk has already elected its Committee. It is to the Street Committees that the Earthly Tract Society look most confidently for the carrying out of their most ambitious projects. For in morals and in sanitary measures, and in the general Conduct of Life, nothing can be forced on the people which the people have not resolved upon getting for themselves. But consider the possibilities of a Street Committee. Where would the wicked man find a home if the Street Committee be watchful for righteousness?

Where would the Fenian and the Dynamiter rest their heads if the Street Committee refuse to receive them? What will be the fate of that landlord who refuses to keep his houses in repair? What that of the tenant who refuses to do his share of the cleaning-up work? And how long, think you, will the Street Committees suffer the women to live under the Law of Elevenpence-Ha'penny? There will come a time—one sees it already in the close future—when the pickpocket shall find no home anywhere, and the burglar no place to store his swag and keep his jemmy; when all evil-doing shall be driven out of the land, and faith, goodness, charity, hope, and the love of beauty and the desire for Art shall spring up like flowers in the sunny month of June, and the men shall at last join hands and shall swear by the Living God the women shall no longer be robbed and wronged.

Moses, as we know, proceeded on the method of inculcating all his laws and precepts together—the Earthly at the same time as the Heavenly. But then he had a Chosen People, and even with them the result of this method did not yield results by any means so satisfactory

as might have been desired. Perhaps Claude and Valentine were wise in their generation when they made their people clean first and taught the nobler truths next, and left religion to those who profess religion.

But I am sorry to say that the Assistant Priest of St. Agatha's refused to assist in writing the Tracts, or in their distribution, because they were not in the first place put under the protection of the Church, and because poverty and disease were treated as things which might be removed by wise treatment, and nothing was said about the duty of Discipline, Confession, and Penance, and because the Institution of Lent was left out of the programme altogether.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STEP WITHOUT.

About a fortnight after that strange and terrifying dream came to Mrs. Monument, and when she had at length completely shaken off the horror of it and nearly forgotten to dread its return, it did come again, like some foul spirit who refuses to be laid. It came just as before, with the sound of a remembered footfall. There is no one single man in the whole habitable globe who is not unlike every other man as regards every single feature, detail, and particular of mind and of body. For instance, you may secure the identification of a man for life by taking an impression on wax of his forefinger or thumb, because the curves and corrugations of the skin differ with every man and are peculiar to him. Each of us is individual, and stands alone in the universe—in complete isolation—a thing curious and terrifying

to consider. Most marked of all is a man's footstep, which, once recognised, can never be mistaken or forgotten. So that, when that dead man's footstep came again, Mrs. Monument was stricken with a terror unspeakable, and tenfold worse than on the first occasion. It came in the daytime, too, when such things are never expected. If the spirits of the dead walk, it is at night and in the dark, though even then it is not usual, nor is it recorded of any that they Walk in boots and reproduce the old familiar footstep. I have never yet heard this thing of any Ghost nor have I ever yet seen any who Walked in boots. There have been instances — but they are few — of daylight apparitions, but tradition and custom have established a prejudice against the mixture of sunshine with the spirit world. This is the reason why the Supernatural Terror—a thing quite apart from any other feeling—is so much more terrible by day than by night. A Nightmare we know: not a pleasant creature, but familiar, and an old aquaintance in whatever form it comes. But a Daymare—that, if you please, is a thing so uncommon and of such rare experience that it belongs to the category of

Nameless Things which follow after the long list of devils, imps, ghosts, elves, fiends, Afreets, Jinns, and spectres which possess and enjoy, like Peers of Great Britain, their titles and ranks.

It was in the evening, but before sunset. The old lady had taken her tea and sent Rhoda home. She expected her daughter Polly, and she sat in her great chair beside the empty fireplace, knitting in hand, waiting with the stolid patience of the blind. The evening was warm, and, after a comfortable tea, one may sometimes experience a fuller sense of comfort than is generally the lot of mortals, and Mrs. Monument was just then completely free from rheumatism, and had no other kind of ache, pain, or disease either beginning, or going on, or coming to an end, which is unusual when a person reaches the age of sixty. All these causes combined made Mrs. Monument drop her eyes and her knitting, one after the other, and persuaded her to nod her head with the Royal Condescension only to be observed at such moments, and then to let her soul lie down and be at rest, while her eyes dropped and her lips opened. Mrs. Monument was fast asleep.

She slept peaceably for half an hour. The almshouses were always quiet behind their brick wall, but to-day all the Collegians, except herself, were out basking in the sun, which is a perfect cure for everything when you can get enough of it; and the place was absolutely silent and peaceful. The continual rolling outside of carriages and carts, the tramp of the footsteps on the pavement, were audible, it is true, because they were going on all day long, and the greater part of the night, just on the other side of the wall, but no one in the houses ever heard them or noticed them, nor did they break the slumbers of the lightest sleeper, nor did they add anything to the most grievous headache.

Suddenly Mrs. Monument awoke with a cry. She started and sat upright, with pale cheek and outstretched arms, and blind eyes which rolled helplessly around.

'The step! I heard his step again.'

She listened. But it did not come again. There was the rolling of the tramcar and the jingling of its bells; there was the rumbling of heavy waggons; there was the whistle of an engine on the railway; there were the steps of

passengers; there was a barrel-organ; there was the whistling of a boy. But there was not the step which had awakened her. It was a single and solitary step; a step like Robinson Crusoe's impression of one—only one—foot on the sand—a single footfall—a mysterious footfall—where was the other foot? Was it a one-legged Seven League Boot? Mrs. Monument sat listening for another, but no other touched her ears.

Then she sprang to her feet, and with every outward sign of terror, with trembling hands and parted lips, she began to grope and feel about the room, stopping every moment to listen, lest the step should fall again and should escape her. But she could find nothing; she could hear nothing; as for the footstep, she would have heard it, she thought, fifty yards away. Why, she had heard it once before—the footstep which had been silent for twenty years, but which she never could forget; once before it smote her ear in the middle of the night, and now in daytime, close beside her, in the very room she heard it—a soft and gentle step which she could not mistake.

She felt about the open door; she came

out into the little court and stretched her hands out as if in search of space illimitable.

'It was the Dream,' she murmured. 'It was the Dream come back again. But there was some one in the room. I know there was some one in the room.'

She knew it by the instinct of the blind, who feel the presence of things without seeing or touching them.

And while she stood there, a pitiful spectacle of fear and horror, the latch of the gate was lifted and her daughter Polly came into the closed garden of the almshouse.

Mrs. Monument was wrong. It was no dream. She had heard her husband's footstep, because he was standing before her, looking her full in the face. He was not dead at all, but alive. And he was enlarged; they had suffered him to go free; he was released with a document entitled, after the name of a celebrated play, the 'Ticket of Leave.' He had called a day or two after his release to see his wife, as a husband should, after nearly twenty years of separation. She was, on that occasion, gone to bed; and so he came away. Business, that

is to say, an eager and wolflike pursuit of pleasure and drink after twenty years of abstinence, kept him away for a whole fortnight. Now, his money being well-nigh spent, he called again.

A little while before Mrs. Monument woke up so suddenly and cried out, and began to carry on in so surprising a manner all by herself, there came along the road, on the east side of it, where the sunshine falls in the afternoon and evening, and where, for that charitable reason, they have planted most of the almshouses, a man somewhat advanced in years. He was dressed neatly in a sober grey tweed suit, and wore a round hat. He was slightly built, and a little below the middle height; a thin, spare man with sharp features and small delicate hands; his hair was short and quite grey, and his cheek was smooth shaven. His features were small and fine, especially his mouth; his eyes were bright and surrounded with quite a cobweb of crow's feet and wrinkles. He had something the appearance of a gentleman's servant, a butler in a great house, a hall porter in a club, or something extremely re-

spectable in the Service, and therefore he seemed out of place in a region where there are few gentlemen's servants kept, and where clubs are unknown except for political purposes. Certainly a most respectable person, with a little awkwardness about his manner of walking as if he was a stranger to crowded streets. Presently he stopped in front of a low brick wall with a gate in the middle of it and hesitated. Then he lifted the latch, opened the gate and stepped within, where was the garden of the almshouses, and behind the garden the row of cottages.

The man turned to the right and walked straight to the last of the cottages, that, namely, which belonged to Mrs. Monument. It might have been noticed by an observant person that he walked almost noiselessly, an art which may be acquired by anybody, but it requires study and much practice. When you have acquired it you have also acquired the Stealthy Style, much spoken of by the better class of novelists, those, namely, whose publishers sell their productions at a penny the Complete Novelette. This style may be of advantage to some kinds of professional men, especially if,

as this gentleman was, they happen to be burglars by profession. When the man reached the door of the cottage, which stood wide open, he looked in. Beside the empty fireplace in her chair sat an old woman with white hair, asleep.

The man looked at her curiously.

'She is changed,' he murmured. 'I wonder if she will know me, and I wonder what she will say when she sees me? I wonder if she knows I am alive.'

He stepped inside noiselessly and looked about the little room. The woman still slept undisturbed. There was nothing in the room worth stealing if he wished to steal; nor was there anything particularly interesting to look at; but his eyes fell upon the shelf of books, and he nodded with a kind of satisfaction. So long as the books—his books—were there, he was not forgotten. On the table was some knitting work and needles in a basket, and lying with the work a torn envelope. He took this out—being an extremely curious person—and read the address upon it. 'Claude Monument, Esq., 25 King's Bench Walk, Temple.' It had been, in fact, left there by Valentine.

Claude Monument! He remembered now;

there was a son of his named Claude—Claude Duval. The boy was living, then, or at least working in the Temple where the lawyers live; perhaps a lawyer's clerk. His own son a lawyer's clerk! Strange Irony of Fate! He folded the letter and placed it carefully in his pocket. It might be useful. This man was none other, in fact, than the great James Carey himself, once the acknowledged head of his Profession, formerly the Prince of Burglars. And he was set loose again upon an unsuspecting world after twenty years of seclusion. When such a man as James Carey is set free the world ought to be warned. It was his step that the poor woman of the almshouses had actually heard in the evening. He had come; he had found the room dark and empty, and he had gone away again. Now he was come back to make his release known to his affectionate family, and to look around. Twenty years of prison fare and life do not make a man inclined for honest work; and if there was any money to be got out of his wife and children, before 'jobs' began to offer themselves again, he might as well get that money.

Perhaps he stepped upon a loose plank; perhaps he forgot his habitual caution—I know not—but suddenly the woman started in her sleep, sat bolt upright, and shrieked, 'His step! I hear his step again!'

In an instant he saw that his wife was blind; her glaring eyes rolled over him so to speak as if he was not present; he saw her blindness in her outstretched hands and gestures of helplessness. The thing was quite unexpected, but with quick step and without the least noise, he crossed the threshold, stepped over the flagstones, and took up his position among the cabbage stumps outside, where he waited and watched.

His wife was blind and in an almshouse. He had made up his mind that there would be changes. People do not stand still; the children would be grown up; perhaps they would be ashamed of their father; their mother, he knew, regarded his exploits with a most extraordinary and unaccountable prejudice. He had no doubt that she had tried to make them respectable, whereas, if he had had his way with the children, there would not have been in the whole world a cleverer or a more

successful gang of plunderers, a more united and happy family, or one which lived more merrily and enjoyed more abundantly the fruits of the earth—other people's fruits, of course—in due season. Shame, that a man should not be permitted, even in prison, to direct the education of his own children in their own interests. But if they were respectable and unwilling to own their father, he must then—he had thought it all out—he must compel them to pay for his silence and suppression by a weekly subsidy. But who would have thought that his wife would go blind? He did not know what to say or how to act, and therefore he did nothing, but watched.

She came tottering to the door and stretched out her arms to the world, crying 'Who is there? Who is there?'

The man made no reply. He had fully intended to present himself, and to say, 'Here I am, back again. Give me all the money you have got in the place. Tell me where all the children are. I shall want money till I get back to my old work. As for repentance, don't think of it, and as for talking, stow it.' This was the amiable speech he had proposed

to make. But his wife was blind as well as grey, and, for some spark of humanity still lurking in his breast, he could not make that speech. While he stood among the cabbage stumps there suddenly appeared between his wife and himself a third person—a young lady.

'Mother,' she said, taking the blind woman's hand, 'what is it? Oh! what is it?' For she connected the terror and the helpless hands with the strange man standing, silent, opposite to the door.

'It's the dream come back. Oh! Polly, thank God you've come, my dear! It's the dreadful dream. I heard his step a fortnight ago, in the night—once—only once—upon the stones, and again I heard it just now—once. My dear, my dear, I'm frightened out of my wits. Is it the dead come back to plague me?'

'The step again?'

'Your father's step, my dear. And Something there was in the room. I felt it. Something in the room. His ghost most likely.'

Valentine turned upon the man a face so full of horror, and loathing, and shame, that it actually pierced him to the heart, though his

conscience was long since seared with a hot iron, and twenty years of prison had only hardened him. Yet those eyes made him shiver, and he dropped his own.

'What a strange thing!' She kept her eyes upon the man as one keeps his eye upon a wild beast. 'You are sure you heard his step?'

'Quite sure. As if I could ever forget his step.' The man smiled complacently. 'I heard it on the boards, falling as soft as the step of a cat. And oh! Polly—thank God you've come,' she repeated, clinging to her daughter.

'Why, mother,' she replied, in a strange voice and with burning cheeks, 'he is dead long ago—five years ago;' she held up a warning finger to the man. 'Thank Heaven! the miserable, wretched man died in his miserable, wretched prison, where he deserved to die, and was buried in the prison churchyard, where he deserved to be buried, among the thieves and rogues, his companions. Don't tremble so, mother: he is dead, we have forgotten him and all his villanies.'

'Yes, my dear, yes. But your own father,

my dear. Don't speak ill of your father and your mother, because it brings bad luck. And him dead too. But why did I hear his step?'

'I don't know. There is nobody here, dear,' she said mendaciously, and with another warning gesture with her forefinger. 'You were dreaming again. Now go back and sit down and calm yourself. As for me, I am going to get you something for your supper—a lettuce, I think. Yes, I will be back in five minutes. Go and sit down, dear. Oh! you poor, dear old thing, what a fright you have had! Sit down now. I am here, you know, and if anybody offered to frighten you, I would —I would kill him.' She said this with such ferocity in her eyes that the man in the garden trembled.

She placed the old woman in her chair. Then she went outside again, and silently beckoned the man to follow her. He obeyed her, walking among the vegetables, where his footsteps were not heard.

Outside the place, Valentine took the first turning to the right, which happened to be a new street of grey-brick houses not yet finished. Nobody ever walks in unfinished streets of

grey-brick houses, not even lovers, who will walk anywhere else, but not in unfinished streets, between lines of dreadful grey bricks. On Sundays the jerry-builder walks there alone and wonders how long his houses are likely to stand.

Presently she stopped and turned fiercely upon the man.

'Oh! wretch!' she cried, 'I know who you are. Oh! mean and skulking wretch! We thought you were dead; we rejoiced that you died, like a miserable rat in a trap, in your prison cell, and were buried in the prison churchyard.'

'What do you mean?'

'Silence! Don't dare to speak. Let me think.'

For she understood that the most dreadful thing in the world that could happen to them had happened. Dreadful to everyone of them. To the poor old lady, to Joe, the honest and respectable Joe, who had nothing but his good name, to Sam, to Melenda, and, most dreadful of all, to Claude, and—no, no—Violet must never know, whatever else happened, whoever else suffered. She understood what this man

meant, and she was filled with wrath because she was not his daughter.

'You are not dead, then; and the first use you make of your liberty is to terrify your wife. You ought to have slunk into some corner where no one knew you, and buried your shameful head there till you died. Oh! I know your story, your miserable, disgraceful story.'

'You called her mother,' he said, stupidly staring, 'and you're a young lady, likely, or perhaps only a young lady's-maid.'

She made no reply.

'If she's your mother, you must be my daughter.'

Again she made no reply.

'And a precious dutiful daughter she's made you.' He cleared his throat and began to pluck up his spirits. 'I'll have it out of her for this. You mind that. I'll have it out of her, and I'll have it out of you, too—both of you—all of you.' He stopped to swear a little—just a little—meaning to swear a great deal before he finished. 'Now, then, where's your obedience? Where's your Fifth Commandment?—before I take and wring your undutiful and impudent neck?'

He did use much stronger language, but that was the substance of his remarks, and the rest may be understood. He also doubled his fist and shook it in Valentine's face, but not with much confidence.

'If you dare to touch me with your little finger,' said Valentine, 'I will shake you to a jelly, you miserable creature!'

She was taller than this slight, small-limbed man, and a good deal heavier. Moreover, there was in her eyes a light of wrath so lurid, and on her cheeks such a fiery glow, and she looked so remarkably as if she could do it, and would rejoice in doing it, that the man was cowed. But he looked dangerous.

'Well, then, you're my daughter, I suppose,' he went on sulkily. 'What's your name?'

'I am called Polly,' she replied, with some hesitation. 'Your youngest child was baptized Marla.'

'A pretty Marla you are,' he said. 'This comes of a girl growing up without a father's care. And how do I know what you do for a living? Marla—yes, I remember now. One forgets a many things in quod. Marla it was. I made up the name myself from a beautiful

book about pirates and scuttlin' ships, and fighting with marlin-spikes—they don't keep them books in quod. And the other gal was Melenda. And that name I made, too. I forget how I made that name—Mile End, was it? Mile End in the book?—I forget. And there was three boys—Joe was the eldest—and Sam and Claude; a pretty boy Claude was. Like me he was. I chose his name, too, after Claude Duval, the Prince of Highwaymen.'

Valentine shuddered. Yes, Claude *was* like him; and so, alas! was Violet. The likeness was unmistakable.

'Come,' he said, 'don't go on like a she-devil. I'm back again. You can't get over that. Let's be jolly. Lord! I don't want quarrels. I never did. Your mother 'll tell you that I was always a man for peace and quietness, if such was to be had with my bacca and my grog, or it might ha' been my port wine and my sherry wine. And you're a pretty girl, my dear, with a fine spirit of your own. There! I respect you for it. You're the girl to stand up for your mother, ain't you, now? Kiss your old father, Marla, my dear.'

He made as though he was about to kiss her. Valentine—I shudder; one cannot choose but shudder—Valentine shrank back, and, with a cry of disgust, actually lifted her hand and struck the man on the cheek with so hearty a good-will that he reeled. King Richard Lion Heart never dealt a better stroke. That this wretched convict, this common felon, should offer to kiss her!

'Oh!' she cried, 'if you dare to touch me, I will kill you.'

The man picked up his hat which had fallen off and stared stupidly. That a girl should chastise her own father!

'Oh! what a pity, what a thousand pities,' Valentine went on pitilessly, 'that you are not dead.'

He began to whine, holding his hat in his hand, and addressing the unsympathetic grey bricks and the scaffolds.

'I return home,' he complained, 'after twenty years. The moment I am out I hurry to my wife's humble home. I have put off the old man, and am resolved to lighten her lot and cheer her declining years, which is a shadow of things to come. I am full of

repentance, and count all things else but loss, as I frequently told the good chaplain. My feet are now shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace, and I walk in love. I told him that too, and he believed it'—the man actually grinned. Then he became serious again. 'As for my character, my only anxiety is to redeem it; and having been a brand ready for the burning, but now plucked from the fire, I expected treatment accordingly. And this is what I get! A daughter who calls me names, and strikes her old father. Strikes her poor, old, grey-headed, infirm, tottering father. But I offer the other cheek.' He did so ostentatiously, but Valentine took no advantage of the offer. 'This is the Christian spirit of my child. Take the other cheek. It may kill me. But take it. I have had my faults; I own that I have had faults; but I always loved my children. Let me go to your mother, Marla. She will receive me in a better spirit. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. Let me find out my four other dear children. There is Samuel—my son Samuel. I hope he is given to virtuous courses. And Melenda—my dear pretty Melenda. I pray that she is a

Christian and a Churchgoer, and all a penitent and forgiven father, who has worked out his sentence, and got a good character again, can hope to find. And there is Claude ——'

'Stop!' cried Valentine imperiously.

He obeyed, watching her with furtive and evil looks.

'I know,' Valentine continued, after a little reflection, 'that you can talk. You deceived your poor wife by your lies and your glib talk into marrying you. Let us have no more speeches. Now listen to me'—her words were brave, but her heart was beating. 'Listen to me'—she took courage by the aspect and appearance of the man, who watched her like a cowed and frightened cur—'you are to go away from here—quite away to another part of London. I don't care where you go. You are never to see your wife again, or attempt to see her, or write to her, or let her know in any way that you are alive. Oh! we have thanked God so often that you are dead that we cannot afford to have you coming to life again. You are a dead man, do you hear? First of all,' she repeated, 'you are never to see or to communicate with your wife. Never—never.'

'I hear. What the devil's coming next, I wonder?'

Meantime he had observed—he had not forgotten his old trick of observation—two or three things which struck him with wonder and made him reflect. The girl had white delicate hands; her fingers were not marked or pricked with any kind of work; her dress which was simple was well made, and she wore dainty well-made boots. It is only a lady who wears good boots, he thought, because he had in his old days made careful studies of the sex for professional purposes. But how in the world could his daughter be a lady?

'The next thing is that you are not to try to communicate with any of your children, or find out where they live. Do you hear? You shall not make their lives shameful for them by your loathsome and horrible presence.'

'Suppose I won't promise? Why should I?'

'In that case you shall get no help. I promise you so much—not the least help from any of us. We shall keep you from your wife by main force if necessary. You may starve in the ditch and we will not help you.'

I have often wondered how Valentine

would have received this man had she not known the whole truth concerning Polly-which-is-Marla. One or two things are quite certain. She would not have used language of such excellent plainness: nor would she have boxed his ears: nor would she have been so unhesitating in her manner and her action.

'I only want honest work,' he said with a whine. 'Give me honest work and I will trouble no one. You shan't know you've got a father. I forgive you for your hard words—for your blows. Let us—oh! let us walk in love.'

'I do not believe that you want work at all,' said Valentine; 'you did not work before you went to prison, and I do not believe that you want to begin now. You want drink and tobacco, and nothing to do. Well; I will give you what you want—on conditions. What money have you?'

He sadly replied that he had nothing; not a copper, which of course was a lie. He went on to explain, forgetting that he had already said he was just out of prison, that he had spent such money as was due to him in the fruitless search after work.

'I am weary and footsore,' he said, with a sigh. 'Weariness I complain not of, and footsoreness is my righteous punishment.'

'Lift up your foot.' The man obeyed. Twenty years of prison make a man ready to obey anybody. 'It is false; your boots are quite new; you have not walked about at all.'

'And yet she is my daughter—my own little Marla! That I thought would have sat upon my poor knees and comforted my broken heart. And she's got a hard heart—oh! what a hard heart! I'd rather have my footsoreness than such a hard heart.'

'I do not want any promises or assurances from you at all,' Valentine went on, 'and I want no more hypocrisies. I will give you—I will give you'—she considered how little she might offer—'a sovereign a week so long as you keep away. The moment you seek to find out any of your children or terrify your wife the allowance ceases. Do you hear and understand?'

'Yes, I hear. What's a sovereign? It isn't worth making a promise about. I can spend a sovereign a day and think nothing of it.'

'Then earn a sovereign a day.'

'If you can get a sovereign a week to give away, you can get two. I shan't ask how you get it, my dear. Lord! everybody knows that a lady's-maid—you look like a lady's-maid—generally gets opportunities.' He looked so desperately cunning that Valentine longed to box his ears again. When a woman begins boxing of ears there's no saying where she may leave off—witness the case of certain Czarinas and other ladies who have had command of the knout and the flagellum and the stake. 'Spring it to two sovereigns for your poor old father, Marla, my child.'

'I will give you one and no more—but only on my own conditions. Here is the first week's money.' She opened her purse and took out the golden coin. His eyes greedily grasped the fact that there were many more lying in the purse. 'It is the last if you break my conditions. If you do not, I will send another next week to the address you may name.'

She gave him a leaf from a pocket-book, and he wrote on it an address to some street in the East End.

'You can write to me to the almshouse; to the care of my mother. But don't sign your letter; and don't dare to address me—me—as your child.'

'Who are you, then?' he asked, looking at her with admiration and surprise. 'Who are you, if you are not my child? A daughter of Hester Monument should be standing over a washtub. What are you?'

'That I shall not tell you. Remember that there is not one of your children—not one of them who knows the truth—who will not receive you with shame and horror unutterable. There is not one who will give you a helping hand except myself. You have your choice. Take my twenty shillings a week and go away and get drunk among the rogues and villains—your friends. If you refuse my conditions, or offer to molest any of us, you shall see how much you will get from all of us together. Go!'

There were two or three things in this speech which filled Mr. Carey with pain—especially to be told that his children regarded him with shame. Every man who becomes, whether by his own consent or not, a hermit

for twenty years, builds up during his isolation an *effigie* of himself. Mr. Carey knew that he had retired amidst a blaze of popularity; the papers were full of him and his exploits; portraits were sold of him in the *Illustrated Police News* and elsewhere; he knew that he stood first in the profession, which is a proud thing for anybody in any profession to say. He was the Premier Burglar. He was the gallant hero who pitted his own ingenuity and resources against all the intellect and the strength and the organisation that the richest country in the world can command. To be caught and clapped in prison was a defeat, to be sure, but there was all that glory—'loathing and horror'—the girl called it. This, then, was their mother's influence—their mother's; the influence of one who could never rise to the level of his Greatness.

And she said he had consorted with rogues and villains. Rogues and villains—rebels when successful become revolutionists—would willingly have consorted with him, but he would have none of their companionship. He lived apart from the vulgar criminal; he consorted not with the common burglar. He worked

alone, and he lived apart from his fellow-professionals.

I do not suppose that Mr. Carey expected to be received with open arms. But he did expect some show of respect—at least that respect due to his position in the walk of life he adorned. And to be received with these words of disgust and insult by his youngest daughter—it was hard to bear. Had it been her mother he would have felt it less, because she was a woman of slow imagination and contracted views, and could never understand his glory.

'Go,' said his unnatural daughter.

He obeyed, and started on his way without a word.

'No,' she said, 'not back by that road. You will pass the almshouse, and she may hear your footstep again. Go down this road.'

'I do not know where it leads to.'

'I don't care. Go this way.'

He obeyed, and walked slowly away, turning from time to time like an unwilling cur. Each time he turned his head he saw the girl standing in the road watching him.

When he was out of sight, Valentine returned slowly to the almshouses.

'That was a terrible dream, Polly, wasn't it?'

'A dreadful dream, mother. But I don't think it will come again. I will stay here to-night just to prevent your having it, you know. It won't come if you think some one is with you.'

'Polly, my dear, it is just wonderful the difference since you came back. And, oh! the comfort of having some one that I can tell all my troubles to!'

CHAPTER XVIII.

LE PÈRE PRODIGUE.

The ticket-of-leave man went away obediently; and, once arrived in the main road, he began to think—that is to say, to devise wickedness. This girl, who said she was his daughter, if he could only, in some way or other, get her under his thumb. She was a most beautiful girl; she was possessed of manners which would make anybody think her a lady; she wasn't afraid—Heavens! what could he not do if he had such a girl to work for him? There was once a professional in his own line, a cracker of cribs—he had read this story somewhere in the old days when he used to read so many books—who had in his power, and at his orders, such a girl, whether his daughter or his mistress he knew not. She went into the finest society and kept her eyes about her, and put this fortunate Professor on to what she observed,

and helped him to get into houses, unlocking doors for him, slipping the bolts at night, pulling up shutters, and opening windows for him. And all the time pretending she was a lady. Mr. Carey remembered this beautiful story, and dreamed of the wonderful time he might have if Marla would only be such a daughter to him. And he dreamed as well of the great and glorious reputation he might make for himself; much greater and much nobler even than his first glory, which was now, he already perceived with sorrow, well-nigh forgotten. In fact, the burglar, like the singer and the actor, is liable to a swift oblivion. His works do not, like those of the poet and the sculptor, live after him, and there is little to keep his memory green, except a few pages, perhaps, in the Newgate Calendar.

From daughter to son is a natural step. Mr. Carey began to think of his son as well—there was another daughter; but he had heard nothing about her, and three sons, all men now; one of them, he knew, was a workman of some kind; as for the other two, what were they? She dared to make conditions about her measly sovereign, did she? He was not

to show himself to any of his children. Why —hang her conditions! He would do as he pleased. He would go and see his children if he pleased. The working man, he reflected, would certainly be married, and as certainly would have no money, except perhaps the price of a pint, which is neither here nor there. Besides, he had not yet found out where this son lived, nor where the second lived. There remained the third, his youngest son, Claude, who lived in the Temple. He only knew about the Temple that it is a place much frequented by lawyers, a tribe whom he naturally disliked, and ranked in the same class with policemen, detectives, and judges. His son was employed there in some capacity; a clerk, no doubt. Every profession, of course, preferred to their father's! He took the stolen envelope out of his pocket. 'Claude Monument, Esquire, 25 King's Bench Walk, Temple.'

'It's a chance,' he said. 'Perhaps the boy has got some money. I'll risk it.'

He had been drinking since he left his daughter, and the brandy and water, perhaps, gave him the courage to break the conditions and so endanger the weekly sovereign. How-

ever, he did break those conditions, and yet he did not lose his allowance, as you shall hear.

About ten o'clock that evening Claude was sitting alone in his chambers. He was neither reading nor writing, but the lamp was beside him, and a book was on his knees, and he was looking into the fire, for the evening of early autumn was chilly. Outside, the Temple was very quiet. There are only a few now who continue to live there, and these were out of town; I think that in all these courts Claude was the only living person except the policeman. And there was a silence almost as absolute as that which fell upon the place after the Suppression of the Great Order and the burning of the Grand Master and his Knights.

He was thinking about the strange work in which he was engaged; and upon Valentine, who thought she was his sister, but was not, and of her glowing cheeks and kindling eyes, and the voice which moved him like the notes of some great organ playing mighty music. He was thinking, too, that it would not lead to peace of mind if he should continue to think of those eyes and that voice.

In the midst of this silence—he heard no warning footstep on the stairs—there was a single knock at his door.

He wondered who could be his visitor so late and so unexpected.

It was a stranger; an elderly man, thin and spare, with grey hair, who stood at his door.

'I beg your pardon humbly, sir,' he said, taking off his hat; 'I am come in hopes of seeing a boy, sir, a boy named Claude Monument, who works on this staircase. Perhaps he is in the housekeeper's room on the basement.'

'Can't you read? There is the name on the door.'

The man read and looked surprised.

'I am Claude Monument. What do you want with me?'

'You Claude Monument? You?'

It was rather dark in the passage where Claude stood, but the gas-lamp on the staircase showed Mr. Carey that his son was not quite what he had expected.

'Is your master out of the way, young man?' he whispered.

'What do you mean?'

'Your master. Is he out of the way?'

'My master?'

'Can you take me where we can have a quiet talk together—you and me—without his asking questions? It's for you and me together, you know.'

'Who are you?'

'I've something important to tell you—something joyful. But, I say, you can't be Claude Monument? Why, you're dressed like a gentleman.'

'Who are you?'

'Well, that is just what I have come to tell you.'

Claude hesitated. 'These are my own chambers,' he said.

'Good Lord! Your own chambers!' The man was amazed. 'Your own chambers! Your own! How the Devil—and the gal looked like a lady. Quite time I called and inquired. Look here, young man, if you live here, and if you are alone, take me inside. I've got something to say; something—ah!—something you'll be pleased to hear. But we ought to be quite alone. It is a family secret, young man—a family secret, and it mustn't be talked out loud.'

'Come in, then.' Claude admitted the man and shut the door, not without some presentiment of coming evil. A presentiment never does any good, being in this respect like the cold wind before the rain; it comes too late for a warning, and no sooner is it felt than the Evil thing is upon one. Yet it is a comfort somehow to feel afterwards that one had a presentiment. Men bitten by rattlesnakes have often been consoled in their last moments by this thought.

'Now,' said Claude, leading his visitor into the room, and shutting the outer oak, 'who are you, and what do you want? I don't remember to have seen you before.'

There was only a reading-lamp on the table, but the lamp was covered by a shade, so that the room was comparatively dark. The man had taken off his hat, and was now holding it awkwardly in both hands as if he wasn't used to a hat of that kind; indeed he had worn one of quite a different shape for twenty years. Claude saw that he was grey-headed and smooth-cheeked, and that he was a man of slight build.

'Now then,' he said, 'go on with your important news.'

The man cleared his throat.

'Are you really and truly, young man,' he asked, 'Claude Monument?'

'That is my name.' Claude owed no man ought, so that the man could not possibly have come for money. Perhaps he was a beggar of the more complicated kind, a book hawker, or one who touts for subscriptions. But beggars of this kind ply their trade by day. He felt uncomfortable.

'You are the son of Mrs. Monument who used to live beside Hackney Marsh, and—if one may speak of it to a swell like yourself—took in washing, being a poor but honest woman.'

'My mother was a washerwoman,' said Claude.

'Well,' the man went on, 'I don't understand it. You look like a gentleman, and the other'—here he checked himself—'And you live among the lawyers.'

'I live among the lawyers.'

'I've seen 'em in court—many times, takin' their characters away from unfortunate men.

I've seen 'em, and heard 'em.' He added a short but impressive prayer relating to their final doom. 'And you live here! Lord! his eyes swell out with fatness, and look at me without a mag.'

'Who are you, then?'

Claude snatched the shade from the lamp. The man was decently dressed; he did not look like a beggar; yet he was certainly trying to get something out of him. As for the man's knowing something of his family history, everybody knew that. Wherever he went, on his first introduction, or on the first mention of his name, there followed the whisper, that he had often actually heard, and more often saw on the lips of those who uttered it. Your own experience of the world, dear reader, will supply the words.

The man did not reply. He was looking about the room, which had a certain appearance of wealth—that is to say, there were easy-chairs, pictures, half a dozen silver cups won at scratch fours and other sports; and there were a few 'things,' as collectors say; there were books—heaps of books—and curtains, and carpets, and all the things which go to

make a young man's chambers look handsome and well-appointed. On the mantelshelf were two large photographs of two girls. The man recognised one of them. 'That's Marla,' he murmured; 'the other, I suppose, is Melenda.' Then he turned sharply to Claude.

'Are all these things your own?'

'Certainly.'

'And you leave your mother in an almshouse. And the other one'—he checked himself again, though the situation was absolutely incomprehensible.

Claude reddened, but he kept his temper.

'What has that to do with you?' he said. 'Get to your business.'

'Young man, you leave your mother there—blind, too—among paupers, without a sixpence to bestow upon any deserving relations and friends who might happen to call——'

'Get on with your business.'

'If such is your treatment of your mother, how would you treat your unfortunate father?'

Claude laughed.

'For Heaven's sake, man, tell me what you want, or I shall turn you out of the place.'

'If your unfortunate father was to come to

you, not having seen you for twenty years—if he was standing before you poor and destitute, as I might be now, but happy in his mind through repentance; all his old pals scattered, and nothing left him in the world but his hopes of heaven and his good resolutions for the path of righteousness, which wraps a poor man as with a garment, and keeps off of him the cold wind of poverty; and with his clear conscience and his term worked out and his ticket in his pocket, afraid of no man, whether policeman or magistrate—would you treat that father with scorn, and send him, like you sent your mother, to an almshouse for the remainder of his days?'

'Can you do nothing but ask questions? Now, man, come to the point or leave the place. As for my father, you may keep his name out of it, because he has been dead for twenty years.'

'Suppose he wasn't dead,' he whispered hoarsely, looking Claude full in the face, but only for a moment, for his shifty eyes dropped again. 'Suppose your father wasn't dead, after all.'

'I cannot suppose anything of the kind.'

'Who told you he was dead?'

'I don't know. I have always been told he was dead.'

'Did they never tell you where and how he died?'

'No; I never asked.'

'And did they tell you what was his trade?'

'My father was a locksmith, and clever at his trade.'

'He was. Correct, young man. There wasn't a finer locksmith in all London either for making a lock or for picking one—or for picking one, mind—which made his fortune and his name. There wasn't a cleverer man at his trade in all England—ay, you may throw in the United States as well, though he never practised in the States. He was the envy and the pride of all such as followed the same trade. A locksmith! And so that's all you know about it. Lord! To think that children *could* be so bad brought up. So you think your father was a low mechanic, do you? That's what they told you. And that he's dead. That's what they told you. Well, it's like them. It's all part of the same treatment. Made you

ashamed of your own father; called him a mechanic, did they?'

'This is very strange.' Claude by this time felt a profound uneasiness in the presence of this man, who looked at him so curiously and asked so many questions and gave no answer to any. 'Can't you tell me who you are, and what you want?'

'Directly—I will directly. So he was a locksmith, and clever at his trade, and he died somewhere. Nobody knows where; none of his children ask after him; no one cares about him; they have even dropped his name and taken their mother's.'

'What! Dropped his name?'

'Young gentleman,' he went on slowly, 'I've got a most important communication to make. Give me something to make it on.'

'Here are paper and pens.'

'I want drink, man. Good Lord! I've been off of it for twenty years, and I've only just begun again. Give me something, I say, to make it on.'

Claude gave him some whisky. He drank half a glass of the spirit neat, and then a tumblerful mixed in equal proportions.

'That's what I call something to make communications on. Now then, I'll sit down, I think.'

He sat down. 'A most comfortable chair, too. You swells know how to make yourselves comfortable, don't you? And to think that you're a swell, and your mother in an almshouse! and your father out on his ticket of leave!'

'What!' Claude started. 'Say that again, man. What do you mean by that?'

'A dozen times I'll say it, young man. Your father, I said, out on his ticket of leave, I said. Out—on—his—Ticket—Ticket, you know—Ticket—of Leave. Leave, you know. For the unexpired part of his term. That's what I mean.'

Claude did not call him a liar; he only gazed stupidly at him.

'I will say it a hundred times more if you like,' continued the stranger. Your father——'

'No! don't say it again. Don't—don't dare to say it again.'

'Why, you are not ashamed of it, are you, mate? You can't be ashamed of it. A Ticket of Leave is a very honourable thing to have. Only well-conducted convicts, and them as can

stand fast in the Faith and can be trusted, and are favourably reported on by the good chaplain, ever get a ticket of leave. My good chaplain thought very high of me when I came away. Continue in Prayer, sez 'ee, and watch in the same, he sez.'

'Your chaplain? Yours? Are you a convict, too?'

'Look here, young feller, don't speak as if convicts was dirt beneath your feet. Very likely you'll be one yourself before long. Most chaps are sooner or later. Convict! Yes, and why not? I've served my eighteen months, and my two years, and my five years, and my five-and-twenty, and by this time I ought to know. Convict? Why, there's many and many a better fellow in than out, let me tell you. As for yourself, with your swell clothes and your pictures and all, I should think you must be in before long. It's a neater turn-out than ever I could show, though I was looked up to as the head of the Profession, and there wasn't a man in it but would have worked under me and proud. But I worked alone. No one knew where I was, nor where I was going next. Yet I never got so far as to rooms

in the Temple among the lawyers theirselves. What's *your* lay, mate? Is it genteel fakin? Is it sport? Is it races, or cards, or what—that keeps such chambers as these?'

Claude felt dizzy and sick. He could not reply.

'You may tell me, my boy, because, you see'—again he lowered his voice and dropped his eyes—'you see, Claude, it's a long time since you saw me, and o' course you can't be expected to remember me. But I am your father. Nothin' else than that, my son.'

'You? My father? You?'

The man crossed his legs in his chair and grinned. He had told his secret, and he was bolder.

'Yes, Claude, I'm your father. I couldn't get out to see you very well, and none of you ever come to see me. Of course, if you'd known I was alive you'd have come regular and as often as they let you. Give us your hand, my boy. You're a well set-up lad, and I'm proud of you.'

'My father? You?' Claude repeated; but he did not take that proffered hand.

The ticket-of-leave man swore a great oath

as loudly as if he had been a Norman king. Then he assured Claude again, and with much greater emphasis, that he really was his parent.

'Look here, boy,' he went on, 'you ought to be proud of your father. But they've never told you about me. Now I've got a surprise for you—a joyful surprise. Your mother, you see, never took any honest pride in my profession, and ran away from me, she did, when she found out what I was. Ran away and took her maiden name again, and told all her children they were Monuments. It wasn't hard to find where she'd gone to, which I did first thing when I came out. Bless you, it was the most convenient thing in the world for me, that little cottage by the Marsh! If ever I was wanted, and when it was convenient to lay by for a bit till people got unsuspecting again, I could go and lay by there. The neighbours, they thought I was in the seafaring line, which accounted for my coming and going as I pleased, and many's the hiding-place I've made in that cottage unknown to that honest woman. She was too proud to take any of my money—well, I had all the more to spend, and I had no pals to stand in with, and so I lived like a fight-

ing cock, travelled first-class like a gentleman, and stayed at the best hotels and drank champagne like the out-and-out swell I was. But I never got to lodgings like this. I wish now I'd thought of that.'

Claude stared at him, and listened without saying a word.

'Well, at last, there I was—five-and-twenty years. So she told you all I was dead; and she never told you who her husband was, nor where he was. My son, I am no other than the great Jem Carey, of whom you've heard o' course.'

Claude's face showed no emotion at all on hearing this intelligence.

'Jem Carey. Why, man, you can't pretend you never heard of Jem Carey. The King of the Burglars they called him; Prince of Housebreakers, some of 'em said. His name was in all the papers, and the country rang with his noble name. Jem Carey—why, you must have heard talk of Jem Carey.'

'Unfortunately,' said Claude, 'I have never heard of him before.'

'Oh! Lord!' said Mr. Carey, properly disgusted. 'And you the boy that I destined for the profession from the beginning. I said to

myself I must have a successor. One of my boys shall be brought up to his father's business. And I had you christened Claude Duval a purpose, after the most dashing highwayman in history.'

Claude for the first time in his life actually wished that he could exchange his Christian name for another—Samuel, for instance, or Leviticus, or anything.

Mr. Carey contemplated his son with a doubtful eye. There was no kindling of joy or of glory in Claude's aspect, but on the contrary a steady look of pain and dismay.

'Won't you shake hands then?' He held out a forgiving and paternal hand.

'No,' said Claude, 'I will not shake hands.'

'Very well.' The man put on his hat. 'I will go away now. I shall come again when you have got your swell friends round you. I will introduce myself to them as a Ticket-of-Leave man and your father.'

'You will do as you please.'

Mr. Carey hesitated. 'Will you give me something to help me on my way?'

'Nothing. Be good enough to go.'

'Your father is starving.'

'That is not true. You are just out of prison. You must have some money. Go.'

'I come back after twenty years of Quod, and I find my boy a swell, and this is how he treats his repentant father.' He looked as if he was trying to cry.

'You can go. I have nothing for you. Take yourself and your history and your prison cant'—he shuddered with shame—'out of my chambers. You have my address. You can send me yours. Whatever we do for you—if we do anything, remember—will be done on the condition that you keep yourself out of the way of everybody.'

'I'm going. I am sorry I came to such an unnatural son. But I have other children. Yes, they will be kinder to their father. They will be Samaritans, if it's only twopence.'

Claude made no reply.

'There's my boy Joe, my eldest. No doubt he's a married man now, and his wife and children will be pleased to see the poor old man, and to take him in. And there is Sam. I can very easily find out Sam if I like. I think Sam will be glad indeed to see me.

And then there's my wife in the almshouse. Poor old woman! she hasn't got any money, but she'll share her crust. And—then there's the two girls. Very likely those are their pretty likenesses.' He pointed to the two photographs. 'The girls look the right sort, don't they? Which of them two, now, is Marla, and which is Melenda?'

Claude took the photographs and laid them on their faces. It was intolerable that this man should so much as look at them.

'Stay,' he cried. 'You shall not even try to make yourself known to—to my sisters. Do you hear? Do you hear?'

He would have seized the man by the collar, but a certain filial piety—a filial repugnance—prevented him. It is impossible for anyone to shake his own father by the collar, however badly he may turn out. Valentine, it is true, had boxed Mr. Carey's ears, but then she had her secret, and knew that he was not her father; and besides, he had offered to kiss her.

'Good Heavens!' Claude cried, looking at the man with a kind of despair. 'They said you were dead. We thought you dead. We

believed—we were told—that you were an honest man. You ought to have been dead long ago.'

'Ought I?' The man grinned. 'That's a question of opinion. Why, I mean to live for thirty years more. Prison is a very healthy place, my dear boy, whatever you may think, though they do cut the diet close. I feel as young and as fit as if I was twenty-five instead of sixty. I mean to live to ninety, and I shall very likely come here a great deal. Thirty years more I intend to live. We shall see each other very often, my son. Oh! very often indeed, Claude, my boy.'

Claude made an effort and refrained, even from bad words. 'You heard what I said about—your daughters.'

'Explain yourself more clearly, my son. I am afraid you presumed to give orders to your father. Whereas you will read in the Epistles, Children, obey your parents in all things.'

'I said that you must not attempt to find out your daughters.'

'Why not, my son?'

'Because your very existence is a shame

and a disgrace to us; and because they are happy in believing you to be dead.'

'Is that all?'

'No. Because they have never been told, poor things, that their father is a convict.'

Mr. Carey put his hands in his pocket and whistled.

'Look ye, my lad,' he said; 'suppose I want my girls. Consider a father's feelings. However, I am a peaceful man; I am always open to reason. What will you give me?'

Claude hesitated. It was clear that this man would have to be bought off. But at what price?

'I don't know,' he replied; 'I must consult my brother.'

'Is he a swell, too? Hang me, if I understand it.'

'No; he's a locksmith by trade.'

'Then I shan't wait for Joe's opinions. I'm one of them who stick to their rich friends. I stay where the money is. Now, there's money here. If you and me don't come to an understanding——' Here he interposed a long parenthesis full of all the words he had not been allowed to use in prison. It treated

of his son's behaviour to him and the revolting nature of that unfilial loathing which Claude exhibited towards him. This, he said, he must and should revenge, unless an understanding was come to. 'Then I go straight to the almshouse—I know where it is, and I'll frighten the old woman into fits; and to-morrow I'll find out Melenda and Marla, and introduce myself to their fine friends.'

Ten minutes later Mr. Carey walked down the stairs. He was richer by thirty shillings than when he mounted those steps. He had also the assurance that this sum would be continued to him as a weekly allowance so long as he observed two or three simple rules. These were, in point of fact, the same as had already been made by Valentine. He was not to make his existence known, or to force himself upon his wife or any of his children, especially either of his daughters. Should he break these conditions, Claude assured him, in the most solemn manner, he should never receive another farthing from himself or from any of his brothers and sisters.

The parent replied that his sole desire was to live virtuously and to retrieve the past in

the eyes of the world; gentlemen who are penitents of this description always assume that the world is following their career with the greatest interest, and yet they continue in a retiring modesty about their own antecedents. He also said that he should strive to find some quiet corner in London where there were none of his old associates, and only pious men. Here he should perhaps be enabled, by his son's assistance, to open a small shop in the good book line. He had thought of conducting an open-air service on Sundays for penitents like himself. As for telling any of his family that he was alive, or being wishful to force his company upon them, nothing could be farther from his thoughts. Claude might trust him. It was not a great thing for a father to ask the confidence of his son. Thirty shillings was little enough for the mere necessities of life. But he would make it do. He deserved no more. Fortunately he never drank; that habit he had given up; he illustrated the remark by taking another glass of whisky and water. He had read a great deal of the Bible while in his cell. Among the

things he remembered were the gracious words of Paul, Corinthians——'

'That is enough,' said Claude. 'Here is your first week's money. I shall send your next to this address. No; don't dare to come here for it. I do not want ever to see your face again.'

'They'll never tell each other,' Mr. Carey murmured, going softly down the stairs. 'They'll be ashamed to tell each other. And they're good, between them, for two pound ten a week. This is a good day's work—a very good day's work.'

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE CHURCHYARD.

When the man left him, Claude remained standing, and mechanically listened for his footsteps on the stairs; they were as light as the steps of a girl and as noiseless; but he heard them on the gravel in the court below. Then they ceased, and he lifted his head and breathed a sigh of relief. He was alone. Something to get rid of such a presence, though one knows full well that it will come again. Over his mantelshelf there was a cabinet adorned, among other things, with a small square of looking-glass. In this Claude caught, as he turned his head, a glimpse of his own face. He shuddered and crimsoned with shame —for he recognised, unmistakably, the features of the man who had just left him. Only for a moment, then the resemblance disappeared;

but he had seen it; he was the son of that man.

He took up the photographs of the two girls which he had laid upon their faces while the man was with him. The same resemblance flashed across Violet's face in the same strange and sudden manner, disappearing instantly. It was like the evidence of an unwilling witness. 'Behold!' said the picture, 'I am none other than that man's daughter.'

He was, then, the son of a convicted felon, a burglar, a ticket-of-leave man, an habitual criminal; not, as he had formerly thought, and often proudly stated, *fabri filius*, the son of a Smith; not the son of an honest man whose memory he cherished with filial pride and admiration; but the son of a man who had spent most of his life in prison; he had been all his life going about under false pretences; his very name was false; it was Carey, not Monument at all; James Carey, his father, was a most notorious and celebrated evil liver, and his own very Christian name was chosen for him in honour of an illustrious thief. His father was a burglar and a convict—the one goes very naturally and fitly with the other. If a man's

birth were a mystery, and if he were tempted to pry into the secret in the hope of turning out a Baron or an Earl, and were then to find out that his father was not a nobleman at all, but only a Rogue, there would be little pity for that man. Because, given an unknown father, and remembering that there are more Rogues than Barons in the world, the chances are in favour of the less desirable connection. But when a man has all his life rejoiced in the honour of his father, and been as proud of him, though he was but a locksmith, as if he had been a Baronet, and now has without any fault of his own such a father sprung upon him suddenly, that man is very greatly to be pitied. He needs all the pity and all the sympathy that the world has to offer. It is one thing indeed to have it whispered that you are self-made, son of a working man; and another thing to hear it whispered, each whisper ringing in your ears like the blast of Fame's trumpet echoed from pole to pole, that you are the son of a—*Convict.*

Claude heard that whisper already. The room was full of the echoes of that whisper. They rang from wall to wall, from floor to

ceiling. 'Son of a Convict—son of a Thief—son of a Rogue!'

'I will emigrate,' he said, 'I will take another name—I will go to some far-off colony where no one will know who I am.'

A foolish resolve. Because there is no colony, near or far off, which will receive any man without knowing all about him; who was his father; what he has done; why he has left his native country. He may keep these things secret if he pleases. Probably they will be found out for him. In either case, he will enter no better society than can be found at a Bar or in a Saloon. He will be a *déclassé*.

London is the only possible place for such concealment. He who travels, as the poet tells us, may change his sky but not his mind. He may also change his name, but never his history—that is unchangeable and indestructible—and that, whatever it may be, good or bad, these honest colonials insist upon knowing before they admit him to their society.

Claude, ignorant of this fact, remembered immediately that he could not emigrate, because it was impossible for him to leave his people. He thought of the misery which might come to

them; to his mother; to his brother Joe; to Sam, proud, like himself, of his honest father; to Melenda—to Valentine first, and to Violet next. He remembered their defenceless condition. Could he be so cowardly as to leave them? Could he go away and leave them to the tender mercies of this—creature? One must not under any circumstances speak evil of one's father; one should not, if possible, even think evil of him. Therefore it is providential that there exist certain neutral words which carry reproach by the manner of expression rather than by any accusation conveyed in themselves. Thus—'this'—gasp—'CREATURE,' 'this'—gasp—'MAN,' 'this'—gasp—'WOMAN.' Moses said, when he broke the tables of stone, 'this'—gasp—'PEOPLE.' We can use such words—gasp and all—without breaking any commandments—blamelessly, and for the relief and solace of the soul.

He stood in his silent room for an hour at least, trying to look the thing in the face, and failing altogether. Then a thought—a feeble thought at best—struck him. Joe it was who said his father was dead. What if the man was an impostor? Why did Joe say he was dead?

What reason could there be for Joe making up a story? He forgot for the moment the evidence of the looking-glass and the photographs, catching as men in trouble do at a straw. He would go at once and consult Joe. His mind was so troubled with the burden of this horrible discovery that he actually forgot that it was already midnight. He seized his hat and sallied forth with intent to get to Tottenham.

He walked down Fleet Street where there were plenty of people about, especially late journalists; up Ludgate Hill which was still awake; and along Cheapside, where the stream of life was still running, but in a narrow thread. At the Bank there were the last omnibuses with a great shouting and a crowd. But Cornhill was quiet. Whether the streets were noisy or quiet, crowded or empty, made no difference to Claude, who strode on, wrapped in his gloomy thoughts. Then he turned into Bishopsgate Street and began the long straight walk which leads past Shoreditch and along the Kingsland Road and the Stoke Newington Road to Tottenham. The road was nearly deserted now, and long before he reached

Tottenham the last belated resident was safe in bed. Nobody awake, he thought, except the policeman and the burg—— perhaps he remembered, with a natural shudder, his own father, getting his hand in again, after many years' total abstinence from the jemmy.

As he walked along the silent road there followed him two Voices, speaking in his ear at either side. They kept on repeating the same words, and those very disagreeable words, such as, 'Your father is a convict and a thief . . . Honour thy father that thy days may be long in the land . . . He has spent most of his days in prison . . . The Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge . . . He is a most notorious and even historical Rogue . . . unto the third and fourth generation . . . The most wicked man, probably, that at present lives . . . that which is crooked cannot be made straight . . . a lawless and impenitent villain . . . his seed shall be destroyed among the children of men . . .' And so on—one at each side. To stifle these voices he began to think of a certain work on the Mystery of Pain, written by a learned physician who persuaded himself that he under-

stood all about it. With pain may be considered Shame and all kinds of Evil. Everybody, said the learned Physician, should bear it cheerfully if anybody else is relieved or helped by it. But who was benefited by the fact that Claude's father was a Rogue? And who, to put a plainer case, can help another man by having a toothache? This doctrine Claude perceived would not help his own case. And then he suffered the Voices to go on again.

When he arrived at Tottenham and stood at the door of Joe's house, with its closed shutters and drawn blinds, he realised for the first time that it was the very dead of night, in fact at two o'clock in the morning, when sleep is at its soundest. He might knock up his brother, but what excuse could be made to wife and children for this unusual disturbance? Or he might go straight home again, which would be absurd after coming all that way. Or he might walk about until morning, which was not far off; or he might find a place where he might sit down and gnash his teeth.

Not many years ago Tottenham was a small country town full of pleasant lanes,

spacious houses, leafy orchards and splendid gardens, with memories of Isaac Walton, and the High Crown and the famous arbour—'the contexture of woodbines, sweet-briar, jessamine, and myrtle'—and the Seven Sisters, and many goodly mansions inhabited by great London merchants, and of Quakers fiery for the faith and abounding in good works. The Quakers have mostly gone; the big houses are mostly pulled down; rows of streets lie to right and left, ugly with grey brick and mean design and monotonous uniformity. Claude strolled about these new streets, slowly and wearily. His first excitement was wearing off; besides, he was feeling tired. Presently he took by accident a road which led him past the new houses and into the region of old Tottenham—such of it as still exists. He was in a lane with walls on both sides—they were old red-brick walls with stonecrop and wallflowers on top, but these details escaped him in the darkness; beyond the walls were trees, and beyond the trees were gardens, and the night air was heavy with the scent of a thousand flowers—the flowers of early autumn when the mignonette is still sweet, and the honeysuckle and

jessamine still blossoming. The lane led him, he perceived, to the Church, which stood, a dark mass with a black tower, outlined against the sky among the white tombstones.

He opened the gate and stepped within the churchyard.

Tottenham church has a very good churchyard, full of interesting monuments of unknown people, and in the daytime you might wander there for a long time and learn quantities of history just hinted at in the bald disjointed way common to tombstones. You might, I say, under happier conditions, but you cannot, because they have stuck up rows of spiky iron railings beside the path, so that no moralist, unless he have very long legs, shall ever be permitted to get any good out of the churchyard at all. It is an abominable, unchristian custom. What should we say if the Catacombs of Rome, or the Cemetery of Arles, were to be closed for ever, and so the messages and lessons of the dead to the living were to be read no longer? What if they were to hang curtains before all the tablets in Westminster, and rub out the inscription of Eshmunazar? This, however, if you come to think of it, is exactly

what the bright Intelligences of Tottenham have done for their folk. At Waltham Abbey, too, this same thing has been done, and at St. Giles's in the City, and I dare say in hundreds of churchyards. There are, again, two splendid yew trees in the churchyard which ought to be surrounded by benches for the old folk to sit upon in summer evenings; but they are now within the spikes and there is no bench round either of them, and so another opportunity is lost until, in good time, there may haply come a Vicar with a touch of poetry and sentiment, and a feeling for the dead; and then the spikes will be taken away, and the benches will be put up, and the tombstones will resume their solemn lessons to the living.

Claude was more desirous of resting than of reading the monuments; it was too dark to read, and, besides, he was not in a moralising, but rather of an accusing and rebellious mood. He stepped over the spikes, however, being tall enough and long enough of limb, and finding a flat stone, sat down upon it and tried to think connectedly, which he had not as yet been able to do. It is something in every case of trouble, just to put the facts plainly. Three or four

hours ago, he explained to himself, as if there was somebody inside him who was very stupid, he had suddenly come into possession of the most undesirable thing in the whole world, a thing absolutely impossible to get rid of, or to forget, or ever to put away and hide—namely, a disgraceful and shameful father. Try to think, you of the majority, whose fathers have lived blameless lives and left an honourable record behind them—put it to yourselves—what it would have been to you, had they, like Claude's father—you will find a difficulty in finishing the sentence.

When your doctor discovers that you have got a disease which he will never be able to cure, which you will have to carry with you to the grave, a burden which will never fall off your shoulders, you presently, when the shock is over, fall to inquiring after the various methods employed by the faculty for alleviating the horrid thing, just as the man who has to carry a knapsack is always trying to adjust the confounded straps into the most comfortable position possible. Claude began already to adjust his straps. It was a horribly heavy burden which was laid upon his shoulders. It was a

burden with which he could no longer venture among his friends; it would render impossible for him the only life which he thought worth having—the life of culture among men and women of culture. It could not be hidden away or disguised; it was like a humpback. How could such a burden be alleviated? There seemed but one way. It was the way already adopted by Valentine. His father must be bribed into effacing himself. No one must be permitted to know of his existence or to see him except Claude himself. He must bear the burden alone; he must keep the secret to himself. Perhaps when his father—he kept on saying 'my father' to himself, in order to bring the Thing home more completely—when his father quite understood that his only chance of getting money was to keep quiet and out of the way, he would do so. If he disobeyed, why then—Claude ground his teeth—then he might do his worst; and then—poor Violet! —poor Valentine! He sprang to his feet in an agony of wrath and shame, for in such a case he could do nothing for them, nothing at all, but sit down with them in sackcloth and ashes, and remember that this was only the first

generation and that there were yet two or even three to follow, with the sins of their grandfather to drag them down as they strove to climb upwards.

The annals of our ancestors are for the most part forgotten, so that it is only in great families, whose history is preserved and handed down to posterity, that the tragedies, the disgraces, and the shames are remembered. To do the great families justice, they seem rather to rejoice in the desperate villanies of their ancestors. But the evil deeds of the rude forefathers are for the most part vanished into oblivion, no longer remembered, no more talked about by the second and the third generation, though they may, in their poverty and obscurity, be suffering for those sins. Who remembereth that the great-uncle of the family baker—himself a very worthy man—was hanged? Who careth that the respectable family solicitor had a grandfather by the maternal side sent to Botany Bay? What difference does it make to the Vicar that his father's sister—the thing having been carefully concealed—ran away with the groom? All these stories are clean forgotten and out of people's minds; so that

the sins of the fathers do not seem always to pursue the generations which come after. Yet there are some hereditary disgraces which nothing but the waters of Lethe can wash away. Where is that benevolent stream? In what region, in what unknown corner of the earth does its current flow? How shall we find it so that we may make that which hath been vanish away and become as if it had never been? There is a way—religious men tell us that way—by which things may be forgiven; but I have never yet heard any method by which they can be forgotten.

I suppose it was somewhere about two o'clock in the morning when Claude sat down upon the tombstone, his mind torn by these and a thousand other thoughts, which took shape in the twilight and flitted before his eyes like ghosts in the deep shadows of the place. The headstones became faces which mocked and jeered at him; he saw the figure of himself wandering in the dark shadows with downcast eyes and bowed and shameful head; the shades of Valentine and Violet fell at his feet, weeping and sobbing for shame and disgrace; his brother Sam stood before him with clenched

fist, grinding teeth, and helpless rage in his eyes; Melenda turned away in humiliation from her friends and hid her proud face; and his mother wept because the thing she had concealed so long from her children had come to light at last. The night was not dark, but there were black depths beneath the trees and in the recesses of the church; there was such a dim suggestion of light as is favourable for a procession of ghosts. Presently there arose a young moon in the east; the sky was clear and the air was quite still. The silence fell upon his heart, but it did not soothe him. The dead men lying around him tried to whisper comfort in his ear—'We have lived; we have suffered; we are dead. Our suffering is over; yet a little while and no shame or disgrace can touch you—your lot shall be with us.' Yet the words brought no consolation. Then the still soft air of the night lay upon his cheek and murmured gently—'Live out thy life. This thing can do thee no harm; go on as if it had never been.' And again, 'Bear it alone and bear it with brave heart, for the sake of those who might be crushed beneath the burden.' But these words failed to comfort him. And

again—we are a scoffing and an infidel generation; but in all times of sickness, sorrow, or any kind of adversity, there are certain words which rise up in the mind of every Englishman, though he believe in nothing at all but his own infallibility. They come out of an old Book which it is a fashion with some to dishonour, to neglect, and even to deride—so in Claude's mind there arose and lingered certain words which need not be set down concerning strength and trust, and presently he lifted his head and saw the grey dawn spreading in the East, and heard the birds twitter in the trees around him. Then he got up—the air was cold—and he shivered. It was light enough now to see things clearly outlined in the chill morning light. He tried the handle of the door of the Great South Porch—by great good fortune it was open. Within there is a bench on either side—he thought he would sit down there. But he tried the handle of the church-door. Wonderful accident! That, too, was open, and he stepped within the church. It was fast growing lighter; the painted windows—the lower windows are all painted in Tottenham Church—were beginning to show a glow of

colour, and a pale light shone in the clerestory windows, making the bays and aisles and columns mysterious and ghostly. Then the windows grew brighter, and the colours warmer, and presently the East sprang suddenly into splendour when the sun rose and the colours fell upon pillar and on wall, painting in crimson, blue, and gold the figures of Ferdinando Heyborne and Richard Kandeler and Eliza his wife. With the daylight the ghosts and devils of the night fled shrieking, and Claude stood upright, facing the splendid sunshine, and remembered that he was a man, with a man's work before him, and a man's duty to bear, and his burden to endure, and his honour in his own hand, and that the past was dead. Wherefore—I do not explain the phenomenon, but I state it—while his strength and courage came back to him, and he felt once more the power of his will, and peace returned to his soul, his eyes overflowed with tears, and he sat down and hid his face in his hands, and then—he fell fast asleep.

It was nearly eight o'clock when he awoke and went out of the church. The business of the day, so far as concerned the birds in the

gardens round the churchyard, was already pretty well over, because the sun, who gets up about half-past five at this season of the year, was already nearly halfway towards high noon. It was too late, moreover, to see his brother, who would now be on his way to the workshop, or perhaps already deranging somebody's pipes, laying the foundations for an attack of typhoid, or for a boiler explosion, or an overflow of the bath, or an escape of gas—for Joe was really clever in his own line. But that mattered nothing. Now, he was not going to tell Joe or any one else at all. It should be his own secret.

'I wish, however,' he said, 'that I had a clothes-brush. And my boots would be all the better for a little attention. I'll go and see my mother.'

She was already dressed and in her arm-chair. To his astonishment Valentine was there too. The fire was burning brightly, the kettle was singing, the cloth was spread, and she was making the tea, looking fresh and bright enough to raise the spirits of a man going in for a competitive examination.

'That is the step of my boy,' cried the old lady, while he was yet afar off.

'Claude!' cried Valentine. 'You here at this hour?'

Claude stooped and kissed his mother.

'Give him a kiss, Polly,' she said, in the quick peremptory tone with which she ordered her daughter about. 'Can't you kiss your own brother, child?'

Valentine blushed but obeyed—that is to say, she offered her hand as a substitute for her cheek.

'Suppose,' said Claude, when he had paid this knightly homage—'suppose I had got up early in order to walk here and have breakfast with you, mother? But how is it you are here too, Valentine?'

'I stayed with mother all night because her nerves were a little shaken, and I did not like her to be alone.'

'We're glad to see you, my dear. Polly, go and buy two or three eggs and a bit o' bacon. The boy must be hungry. Have you got any money, child? Now, run, my dear; make haste.'

Valentine nodded to Claude, and laughed and ran upon her errand.

'She's a real good girl, Claude,' said the old

lady. 'That's what she is, mind; there's nobody like Polly. Don't you let her be put upon by Melenda. She's got a heart of gold, and she thinks of everything. Last night I had a dreadful fright—oh! a most terrible fright, and it put me all of a shake——'

'What was it, mother?'

'My dear, I thought I heard a footstep—it was a footstep that I knew, and the second time I heard it—the step of a dead man—your father, Claude. It was only a dream, I know; because Polly, she came in a minute or two afterwards, and she said there was nobody. But it gave me such a shake as I never had before; I haven't felt like myself ever since. But Polly, she don't mind staying here.'

'What time was it, mother?'

'In the evening, about eight o'clock. Polly stayed all night with me because I was afraid.'

'And you—you heard nothing more, did you?'

'No—nothing more. It was only a dream, you see. But it gave me a terrible turn. When a person is blind, she feels these fancies more than most.'

'Don't think any more about it,' said Claude. It must have been the step of his father; but how was it that Valentine saw no one? And how could his father have got his Temple address?

Then Valentine came back with her purchases.

'You don't look well, Claude,' she said. 'You have dark rings round your eyes and you are pale. Have you been walking too far before breakfast? or have you been working too hard?'

'I am very well—but I thought you were looking pale, Valentine. There is nothing the matter, is there?'

'What should there be?' she answered with the approved evasion.

Involuntarily they watched each other, both thinking of the dreadful secret they knew and would keep from each other. And once Claude met Valentine's eyes, and he felt, wondering, that they were full of pity. Why did she pity him? Yet, if she knew—oh! how greatly would she pity him! He could not mistake that expression, which would be read and understood by the merest beginner

in the art of thought-reading. Why did Valentine pity him? She knew nothing.

'Eat your egg while it's hot, my dear,' said the old lady, pleased to have her boy with her. 'You were always a famous boy for an egg. Polly, my dear, cut his bread and butter thick. And plenty of sugar in his tea. What a boy he used to be for sugar, to be sure! Claude, it's twelve years and more since you had your breakfast with your mother. If I could only see you—oh! dear, dear—if I could only see you with my own eyes as I used to see you, eating hearty as you used to eat. I suppose you've grown out of bread and dripping—Polly, is the bacon kept hot for him? Don't let him say we sent him away hungry. I hope the loaf is to your liking, my boy! I wish we had some jam for him. Cut him a crusty bit, Polly. He used to like the crust. You and me can eat the crumb'—and so on, because her boy was at breakfast with her; and because, as women use, she made a king of him, and of herself and her daughter she made his slaves.

Claude ate and drank, being hungry after his night in the open, and he tried to laugh

and joke. Between him and Valentine—each saw it and thought it hidden from the other—stood the spectre of a grey-headed man, with cunning eyes and smooth face, holding out his hands for more, and threatening to turn all their innocent joy into mourning ; and all their pride into shame !

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON